Carnuntum

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A Timeless Tale

In which we are introduced to the principal players in the eternal war between empire and folk, represented here by the Romans and the Germans where they collided at the edge of the Roman empire, Carnuntum, the capitol of Pannonia in beautiful Österreich, on the banks of the Danube.

Reviews

Praise for the "Religion of the Aryo-Germanic Folk: Esoteric and Exoteric"

- "Excellent book on Wotan and Aryan beliefs, pre-Christian Germanic customs, religion and much more."
- "This book is very informative and detailed for those who are of German descent and want to reconnect with your roots and the Gods of your kind."

Praise for the "The Secret of the Runes"

- "After carefully explaining each rune he goes into a linguistic explanation of roots of Germanic words and word meanings. Some of this then applies to the runes as hieroglyphs. Throughout all he weaves Aryan thought and religion."
- "In short, it seeks to mesh all that he considered to be good of Germany into a singular text, a weltanschauung."

Praise for the "The Invincible"

- "Incredible piece of literature to honour my ancestors and all they worked so hard for...if you love your folk please invest in this author.

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Dedication

To Thorshof,
Words are Wind, Deeds are Iron

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the good folk of the Asatru Folk Assembly for taking our Gods out of the pages of books and into the reality of our daily lives. We believe in ourselves and in the Aesir. Today a thousand hearts beat as one in our church; tomorrow may it be millions.

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To Begin

Dear reader!

It is a peculiar thing about the preface; it is often written not to be read at all by most.

But now I have such an excellent opinion of you, best of all readers, that I trust you will read this preface of mine at the very least after the twenty-second chapter. Thereupon be it ventured.

My book was like the seed of the vine: it takes a long time until it comes to drinking wine.

It was more than twenty years ago. There I first saw those mysterious labyrinths inside the earth, there I first saw those strangely shaped hills. I felt indeterminate, unclear at the sight of them. But I felt powerfully attracted to them, I drew, painted, collected. Later came the realization. Many a learned researcher has since sewn himself to those enigmatic buildings and, with more or less luck, tried to interpret them. Already Friedrich Panzer mentions them in words and pictures in his solid "Contributions to German Mythology", Munich 1848-1855. He was, concerning the interpretation, on the right track, nevertheless he did not hit it correctly. In more recent times, meritorious researchers have unearthed an undreamt-of wealth of material, especially in those regions in which the present novel is set. Particularly in these regions, Baron von Sacken was favored by rare luck. Dr. Matthäus Much. Pastor Lambert Karner and painter Ignaz Spöttl, who achieved something amazing. (1) However, as enthusiastic as I am about their discoveries and other achievements, it seems to me as if luck had fled from them in the attempted explanation: only Dr. Much and Spöttl went farther than the milestones of

1. Concerning Carnuntum, there was also the epoch-making research of Messrs. Freiherr von Sacken. Dr. Friedrich Kenner and Amon Widder.

proper scholarship allowed so far - they ventured, and with luck, into the field of speculation.

I was attracted by my research trips not only north of the Danube, but also to the ruins of Carnunt, where the picture formed itself. It was there, in the shadow of the Heidentor, that I read Ammianus Marcellinus' report on the destruction of Carnuntum.

Dear reader! Did you perhaps have the opportunity to read the history of the German war of 1870/71 as described by French pens? In the Moniteur, for example? Just as it happened to you there, so it happened to me under the Heidentor when I read the Roman Moniteur, Ammianus. It is astonishing how far the Romans had already come in the art of whitewashing battle reports!

How innocuous it may have been read in ancient Rome of the inconspicuous remnant, which was called Carnuntum and whose loss was hardly worth mentioning! This is what Ammianus wants his Romans to believe, sweetening the bitter pill for them. - But how galling such scribblings could be in the face of the miles-wide field, which still today offers everywhere clear signs that it was once covered with palaces. An "inconspicuous nest" with African marble!

Already I wanted the tip of the pen for an exceedingly learned treatise on historical falsifications; already the plan lay fixed and ready in my head, probably divided into intentional, unintentional, systematic, political, patriotic, etc., falsifications. Then a book fell into my hands that saved me from such an atrocity. It was my favorite book: Scheffel's Ekkehard. It says clearly on the first page: "This book was written in the good faith that neither historiography nor poetry can be harmed if they make intimate friendship with each other and unite in common work."

"Scheffel is my man!" I exulted. "Shabab, pearl of all knowing!" said the joyful poet in me with his smile to the learned archaeologist. He also smiled and disappeared.

In this wondrous moment I had received this book from the spirits.

But it was not yet written; it was just wandering around me. But I felt good, unspeakably light. Then I took lily-white, innocent writing paper and began to banish the spirits that hovered around me. That was a pleasurable day's work!

Often it came over me, and drew me out there, where my still disembodied figures were cavorting; over and above the Danube.

How often I dreamed then in the moonlight under the Heidentor; mind you, only then, when the grain was harvested, because earlier the land gunners would have seized me.

But when the moon then threw the lonely bow in sharp outline onto the pale gray ground, as if it were his sketchbook, then a very merry company hovered around me, silent and yet so eloquent!

In such moments it is dangerous to approach the composer of such air

figures. I have often warned them, the reckless ones, who joined me when I went into ghost-banning, as they jokingly called it, not quite incorrectly. For there, where the poet forms and physically shapes the air beings hovering around him, it can happen to one, who is just at hand, that his dear ego is quite unconsciously shaped and from then on is forced to lead a restless life among the figures of the poetry in the making. I have also warned you, friend X, about this, as it is the duty of an honest man! Still I look at you beside me, your weepy little wänstlein outlined by the moon gracefully on the stubble field. Can I help it that in the enthusiasm of the twelfth bottle of Donauperle you spoke the fateful word: "Do you still know me?!" There again one of my figures had embodied itself, and with meaningful smile I gave you the answer:

"Do I know you? You Caius Publius Petronius, you darling of three deified emperors, I know you well!" Others had not fared better.

I was also cradled by the Danube girl in a smart rowing boat; past the crumbling vineyards with the wall fragments, the water pipes and the bored herons. The nimble boatman, his name was Siegfried, landed me on the crags of the Maidenberg near Thebes. There, at the mouth of the Marahabia, lies an idyllic little place hidden deep in the delightful solitude of the floodplain forest. How wonderful it is to dream there - for two! There I see my Equitius in Swanhild's arms. Long ago, envious debris has silted up the mermaid pond, but fifteen hundred years ago it may well have lied there. -

Yes, there it is! May he have stolen? Why did I write so definitely in the book that he stole?

Playfully the imagination builds the seven-colored bridge of the gods, lightly the poet floats over the gaping abyss that tradition has not filled. The historian, however, with his evidence-filled satchel, must grasp and descend the steep wall to the bottom of the abyss, in order to gain height again, gasping, because the bridge of the gods would never be able to carry him. And yet, both travel the same road, both strive for the same goal. For the imagination does not drive its being unbridled, it only offers conclusions of probability where the scholar shrugs his shoulders. But it is therefore no less true what she tells, only more graceful in form.

Then, however, something came floating up, which the scholar nobly rejected; this was a very fair goddess, as she unveiled herself, and was nevertheless considered an old woman. It was the good woman Saga.

She confided to me in a tender hour: "Once upon a time, in times immemorial, there dwelt near the Schneeberg a ghastly dragon-worm; it is still called the Würmgarten there. The worm devoured everything, man and beast, and devastated the area disgracefully. Then it happened that a man fenced his farm with logs. - He burned the stakes before he put them into the ground to protect them from rotting. Suddenly the lindworm came snorting straight at the man. The man was not lazy, but thrust the firebrand into the dragon's throat, so that the monstrosity immediately burst. The land was freed from the

beast. The people called their savior Wurmbrand, who then built a castle on the same spot and gave it his name. From then on, he also had the dragon with the firebrand in his coat of arms as a perpetual reminder."

Now the historians say that the first documented mention of Wurmbrand was Count Ottomar, who lived in 1130; what do they care about such old wives' tales!

Well, Saga smiled at such a statement of prudence and nodded kindly to the poet, when he used it, as it is told in the book.

So I sat in the inn at Stillfried - it was such miserable dog weather - in front of a stone jug of old wine and read a book, which I carried in my gun bag. There it was comforting to read: "What was also the old Germans pagan doctrine, one hears best from the wonderful Hausmärlein of the despised pious Aschenpössel and his proud mocking brothers, of the silly and lazy Heinzen, of the iron Heinrich, of the old Neidhartin and the like. Which, without writing, are always passed on orally to the descendants and are generally intended to teach fear of God, diligence in things, humility and good hope, because the most despised person is generally the very best". (Rollenhagen, preface to Froschmäuseler.)

Then the worm-burning legend came to me and I agreed with old Rollenhagen.

Another time I had hiked from Oberhollabrunn to the old healing place of Stronegg. Up on the local mountain, I sat in good company with myself, a bottle of good wine and an old book. There we held a very cozy conversation. The old book had been printed in 1680 post Christum natum; it was Jucundus Jucundissimus.

A venerable voice said to me then: ". . . . Thus we came together in this place, where the servants used to spin the yarn. Because it was the custom that one after the other had to tell a tale or other story. Then, to tell the truth, not only the noblewomen, but also I and the scribe had all our pleasure in such tales, so we often asked the old beggars to tell such tales and gave them a deuce more. -"

Thus the red thread was found. The people in their legends preserve many an invaluable memory, which fits into the frame as if by itself and completes the picture. Certainly it is the merit of the historical novel to spread light over some otherwise dark epoch of our prehistory, because to read the works, which scholars wrote for scholars, that is not everyone's preference.

Therefore, it should not be said that the novel may be carelessly worked. But where the historical picture shows a gap, there he may and must follow the old drawing to supplement the gap, and make the colors fresh. The author of the historical novel has to proceed not unlike the restorer of an ancient object that is fragmented. The museum preserves the fragments. The collector, on the other hand, if he is artistically minded and not a fool, makes the shapeless junk new by first having it cleaned of chronic dirt and rust by an art expert, then

repairing the defective parts and freshening up the color, but replacing the missing parts in the proper form.

In such a newly acquired work of art, the art-lover has edification as well as pleasure, while he passes by the unrestored junk without attention, because he is not an archeologist to whom even the chronic dust incrustation seems both venerable and lovely.

Such restoration work on faded fairy tales, however, was my ambition.

Sleeping Beauty's castle of wonders had opened up to me, and the treasure of German antiquity lies enchanted within. There I found a forgotten, desolate state room; cobwebs covered the walls, rotten wallpaper hung down in faded shreds. Crushed household goods were lying around. So I tried to freshen up the faded splendor by retaining the old ornaments, and where time had irreparably destroyed, I carefully filled in the empty gaps in the wallpaper in the style of the old drawings, the old color scheme. - In this way, I transformed the desolate state room into what it had been before, into a glittering royal hall of German fame.

If I have really succeeded in this, I will have been amply rewarded for the value. Soon there will be other chambers in Schön-Dornröschens Wunderschloss; there are still enough of them.

Vindomina, in July of the one thousand five hundred and thirteenth year after the destruction of Carnuntum.

The author.

Dramatis Personae:

Teutons:
Erchantaug, a huntsman
Gisalhild (aka Lydia), princess, daughter of King Gambin
Aistmuth, a fallen nobleman

Romans:
Valentinian, Emperor of Rome
Maximianus, Proconsul (Ruler of Carnuntum)
Agrippina, the Proconsul's Wife
Marcellianus, son of Maximianus
Licinius, Aedile (highest judge in Carnuntum)
Marcus Equitius, bold Centurion
Petronius, old veteran
Nera, Agrippina's servant

Others:
Aristippus, oriental philosopher
Edone, tavern owner
Sophrona and Doria, gift girls of Edone

Chapter 1
Erchantaug and Gisalhild

In the rosy fragrance of the morning, the Danube rolled with a roaring flood of foam through the wooded floodplain, out of whose thicket of trees the boldly jagged cliff head of the Maidenberg towered tall and silent. It seemed to look down contemptuously on the dwarfish, defiant towers of the Roman city of Carnuntum; large and silent like the thought of a spiritual giant above the noise of the everyday world.

High-trunked, broad-branched elms and knotty alder thickets formed the centuries-old floodplain forest along the banks, as on the islands of the many-armed stream: densely intergrown tree crowns were inextricably interwoven through the network of climbing plants. Wild hops and tangled clematis tendrils entangled the branches of the forest giants, from whose leaf clouds colorful flower umbels of the climbing plants nodded down. Like slender pillars, shafts of vines rose up from the swampy ground, which incubated withered undergrowth and rampant herbs in a stifling haze.

Light foggy fluff floated like sacrificial smoke toward the approaching sun god, joyful sounds went through the treetops excited by the morning breeze, and the jubilant singers of the forest greeted the powerful night's son with his golden rays.

While a still and stately gaggle of oxen and cows followed with their eyes, a defiant stag burst out into a forest clearing, while Master Reynard the fox carefully flitted through the fern bushes with a mischievous twinkle in his eye, waiting for the partridges, sandpipers and rabbits with an unsolicited morning visit. High above in the rosy ether circled a regal eagle.....

Breaking twigs crackled from the floodplain forest. The leading deer discontentedly tossed its elongated head, picked itself up, and only cracking branches pointed in the direction the noble beast had taken. Noiselessly Master

Reynard had disappeared. Only the royal eagle still circled, unconcerned about the workings of the depths, in calm and proud flight in the sunny heights....

Two men now stepped out of the forest, into the deserted clearing. Both were absorbed in eager conversation. The younger man seemed to be a hunter, but he was not thinking of hunting, which the fleeing deer could not know.

If both men had certain common peculiarities, they were nevertheless fundamentally different. Common to both was the untrimmed, from scissors and scraping knife un-desecrated, head and beard hair, as a time-honored sign of royal descent. But, while the huntsman showed royal wealth and noble nature, his companion showed bitter poverty and extreme neglect. The hunter, of extraordinary size, strode proudly like a king at the side of the elder companion. Precious cloth wrapped his torso, strips of soft leather woven in the shape of armbands clothed his feet and legs, a high-pointed marten cap, studded with a mighty eagle feather, crowned the nobly worn head; only the mighty arms were bare up to the armpits. The upper arms each had an unusually long and strong gold clasp wrapped around them in many coils like a snake, - a truly royal treasure, - so that it seemed as if they were armed with splints of noble metal. His weapon was a long ashen hunting spear and a broad-bladed short sword, while a mighty military horn, made of the forehead ornament of a mighty Urs, hung at his hip: on his back, hanging in two straps, he carried a gray knapsack.

The other wore a shabby game shearling made of an old bear skin, the head part of which covered the man's head like a hood. The forelegs once stripped from the bear served in artless knotting of the poor tunic as a coat clasp to fasten it to the shoulders of the barefoot king's citizen. Arms and legs were uncovered and the upper part of the body was covered with old skins of ignoble animals under the bearskin - but even these were often tattered and in good part had already lost their hair. A long, broad, but completely rusted battle sword dangled from the poor wretches' left hand in a woefully patched together harness.

Hardly were they a few steps out of the forest when the huntsman, angrily stamping his foot, shouted to his companion: "By the flaming sword of Erich! You should be sheared and sunk in a swamp, like a guilty woman! You - a royal nobleman - cowardly allowed the robbery of a virgin to happen? You - a royal nobleman - let it happen that King Gambin's noble daughter, the rune-strong Gisalhild, was stolen and sold as a slave!"

"What could I do, how could I prevent it?" said the other, and now began to tell how he, in order to satisfy his hunger, had entered the pay of the merchants of Carnuntum to protect their pack animals on the Amber Road as an escort. He could not join the auxiliary troops as a legionary, since he was a royal citizen and possessed Roman citizenship. He could not join the proper legions either for the same reason. His rank forbids him lower service, but his poverty denies him higher dignity. Nothing remained for him but the

tombstone of his ancestor in the Cemeterium Carnuntum. As an escort he had a certain independence, even if only in appearance, but nevertheless he envied the slaves their carefree life. This and many other things he discussed with displeasure.

The hunter listened to these discussions of the nobleman. He now knew who he was dealing with, even though he had carefully avoided all inquiries about his origin and name. In the Cemeterium stood the tombstone of "Septimius Aistomodius Rex Germanorum", one of those kings who were imposed on the German tribes by Rome, but whom they always chased away again at favorable opportunities. The hunter knew enough. It was in his plan to search out the descended wretch, but it was equally important for him to keep his own secret and remain unrecognized. Therefore, he now used what he had unraveled in a flash from what he had overheard and called to his companion with inimitable majestic dignity: "Listen, Aistmuth!"

When the man thus addressed heard his name, he obviously flinched and, stopping, looked into the eyes of the hunter with mute astonishment, but he was unable to withstand his flaming gaze, and instead narrowed his eyes timidly. The hunter continued: "Listen, Aistmuth! Rusty swords hate the defenders of the Wall, because rusty hearts rot in the bosom of their bearers! Thou bearest the curse which the Father of Victories laid upon the descendants of thy treacherous ancestor and their clan!"

As if spellbound by horror, Aistmuth stared at the enigmatic hunter, quivering all over his body, and with shaking breath, he laboriously uttered in broken words: "Proclaim - are you omniscient? - one of the immortals? - Came, Neiding thou, - to feast on Aistmuth's ignominy!?"

"You are wrong!" said the other. "You lost yourself and your happiness! Find thyself again! Give your rusty fencing sword a new shine on Roman armor, ennoble it again to the flame of wounds, quench its thirst in the red drink of blood, then Allfather's curse will also depart like the rust from Aistmuth's grandchild!"

Aistmuth's astonishment grew, which the hunter noticed with satisfaction, and therefore, without letting this be known, continued with mysterious dignity: "This I know, and even more! You are destined by the rulers of fate to steer one day in golden triumph on victorious waves of battle, as one of Allfather's heroes! Therefore turn the curse!"

"My astonished horror is ever increasing!" was Aistmuth's retort. "Where from the runic riddles comes this crushing flood!? Art thou a god!?"

Ignoring Aistmuth's interjections and outbursts of astonished awe, the enigmatic one continued, "More still I know! I know where now Gisalhild dwells, and I know also that this very day Allfather himself frees her!"

"You know that too?" cried the other, beside himself with amazement. "It was known to you that she, called Lydia, plays the flute at Edone's? You - are an Ase, probably Zeizzo the Handsome himself, or Heimdall probably even,

you carry his battle horn!"

"Remember, Aistmuth, nothing is unknown to me, up in the stars, or down among the black dwarves, and nothing hidden from what Midgard conceals! The past and the future are without veil to me, and clearly I see now! Farewell! - depart without a backward glance, so dear to you life and limb, future and goal!"

The hunter stood proudly erect, leaning on his ash shaft; with an imperious gesture of his hand he dismissed Aistmuth, who strode away confused and silent, and soon disappeared from the hunter's gaze in the direction of Carnuntum.

The hunter remained motionless in his unchanged position for quite a while, gazing for a long time with a threatening glint in his eyes at the defiant towers of the glittering Marcus-Aurelian colonial city.

Bleak thoughts passed through the lonely man's soul, while the gloomily wrinkled brow was transfigured by the first rays of the morning sun. "Have thanks!" he cried in soliloquy. "Thank you Wuotan, who, as Eticho is my ancestor and also theirs! Thanks to you, from one consecrated to you! Is it not Thy work, host in Asgard, that the stolen maiden came straight to Edone's, in whose triclinium Thy sunken castle -known only to me- sends a secret shaft! Did you not send me the traveling hood? Have thanks for the consolation in the dawning night of doubts! Even the eighteenth rune, my most fearful secret, you, Wuotan, -now I know - will still solve!"

The hunter took one more defiant look at Carnuntum's towering spires, then he picked up his spear and strode back into the floodplain forest. - There, where the forest forms a clearing near the border between Carnuntum and Aequinoctium, which is filled by a swamp, we see the hunter leaving the floodplain forest again and walk towards an old gnarled alder.

The red lights of the early sun flitted like teasing elfin greetings over the marshy waters, which, covered with reeds and algae, shone in the most brilliant colors, from the brightest green of the spring shoots to the darkest of the moss, from the most burning carnation red to a serious anemone color, from the light-like golden shine to the gloomy glimmer of night-dark abyssal depths. Above this merging of color tones, the lightly billowing morning mists floated like Freya's rosy swan's feathers, behind which the alluvial forest giants soon disappeared, soon bathing themselves again in the red glow of the morning sun.

Enchanted by the glow of the colors, the hunter stopped in front of the weathered alder. In regal solitude it rose majestically from the ground; no tree in the wide radius dared to take root near the alder queen. Barely a hundred

Triclinium: A formal dining room. Tricliniums featured three couches organized around a table where the Romans would have dinner. The dinners typically lasted serveral hours with many guests. A large triclinium would have many of these three-couch arrangments, seating hundreds of people.

paces from the edge, at the steep break of the swamp bank, the very location of this tree offered a splendid point to survey the road embankment in both directions of its course, for long distances.

In deep thought the hunter stood before the queen of alders. Like Wotan's wild hunt's scurrying fantastic forms, the storm tide of thoughts chased past his soul.

Yes, it was this alder that the noble Albruna of Stronegg had shown him when she threw for him the staffed rune lots. At that time he thought to become a warrior of battle and to swing the flame of wounds in the raging allfire to sorrowful body harm; at that time he dreamed the happiness to be celebrated one day in high songs by noble singers who would proclaim his heroic name with that of Völsung and Helgi to all the world! But the fate-keepers wanted it differently. - Backwards, with her face turned away, the aged Albruna threw seventeen runes on the shining fleece of the white sacrificial steed. She bent down with her eyes turned away to pick up some of them, and grabbed eighteen of them! What an unheard of event! - Where did the eighteenth runestick come from? - The healing council of the runes now directed his destiny to the divine. He was called, as Koting, as Wotan's son, to renounce the world and to bury his earthly possessions, even his name. He should become Allfather's servant until runic wisdom tells him when it is time to unite the Teutons and to smash Rome. The conclusion of all conclusions, however, would be the eighteenth rune, which Allfather himself would announce to him in the hour of the highest consecration. Therefore, the earth stables wer pointed out to him, the "sunken castle", the subterranean sanctuary of Wuotan, with all the countless chambers and halls, corridors, shafts and tunnels, which extended from here to the stone, deep in the earth under Carnuntum, was destined for his stay. Twelve of his own he housed there and rode out, like Wotan himself on hidden paths from the depths of the earth, and significant was his new name: Erchantaug, the fast-acting one. Now Erchantaug had already won ten followers; all of them were royal, and only the eleventh had been missing until today. Aistmuth was to conclude the ring.

All this chased itself in his soul, and like a prayer this word rose from his pressed heart:

"Allfather Wuotan! How terribly cruel is Your desire! But I will fulfill what Mime's head whispers to you in the hour of destiny! Depriving of the woman as of the night's rest, on surreptitious ways in the deceptive glow of your ego, denying your own name, your own ego, that is what my will demands! My heart, let it become like the torrent in winter, like those of the gods who demand it as a sacrifice! - Your three desirable things, Wotan, which you sent me, they have separated me from the world, from the joys of youth and from the hopes of old age; for gloriously once I sink into the grave. - Have pity on me, weak man, to whom your will gives to be a god! Strong I will be, to force myself, to conquer the world for you and to smash Rome! Already the mists

depart from the timid heart, as they leave the meadow there, again I feel your breath, Wuotan, yes, now I am a god! Gisalhild, I come!"

As if transformed, Erchantaug, the hunter, appeared; his gloomy features brightened, transfigured; he quickly cast peering glances in all directions, and when he knew himself to be unheard, he had nimbly climbed the trunk of the alder and slid through its hollow down into the earth's interior, into a shaft of the "sunken castle".

Inside, however, within Carnunt's walls, the revelry prevailed long after daylight. An exuberant festive mood had taken hold of all strata of society, and young and old, rich and poor, powerful and lowly, pushed and shoved their way through streets and alleyways to view the city in its festive adornment.

Of course, the fort was the goal of all onlookers, because behind its crenellated walls the troops of the garrison had been deployed for the army show, and other brilliant preparations had been made, which had all the more tempting effect on the crowd, because nothing was publicly announced about them, so that the imagination of the spectators was offered a wide field for the exaggeration of the expected spectacle.

To the great annoyance of the onlookers, the gates of the castle remained closed and manned by double guards, so that the jamming stream of people split in the blazing onslaught to flow back to the civilian city, crowded to the right or left, grumbling and disappointed.

Inside the castle, however, all the cohorts and troops of the two legions of the garrison, together with the auxiliary rotas of the Gentes Mareomanorum , were lined up in parade armor, with bright helmets and shields. They awaited the arrival of the inspecting prefect and his staff of legionary legates and military tribunes.

Humming and whirring, this many-thousand-foot beast of showy greed rolled through the streets of the colony; the preparations for the reception of Emperor Valentinian had shaken it from its sleep prematurely. It surged through the shining streets, where wealth had piled up its marble palaces, made of the precious reflecting stone with the green veins, which the exiles had broken in the quarries of Africa under lashes and groans of pain.

In front of the palaces there were statues and busts of the emperor, allegorical and symbolic sculptures, roughly chiseled from sandstone, fleetingly gilded or painted, to which the last leaf or flower decoration had just been attached by slaves. The crude inscribed "Salve" or "Vivat" showed that they

Brief definitions:

Legion: 5,500 Roman troops. **Garrison**: Legions assigned to defend Carnuntum. **Gens**: Roman family name. **Mareomanorum** - Troops of a particular household (gens). **Prefect** is a title of a commander. **Legates** are the commanders of a Legion, equivalent to a modern general.

were hastily made, intended only for temporary decoration. The secondary stonemasons were just good enough to make such sculptures, whose artistic value was therefore not even considered.

But as often as the gawking stream of people saw such a "Salve" or "Vivat", it broke out into loud cheers rolling far away, because with the coming of the emperor one attached the most exuberant hopes for the future, yes, one thought to be able to date the dawn of a new period of glory of Carnunt from Valentinian on, as such had come two centuries ago with Emperor Marcus Aurelius.

"People of Carnunt! Make room for my gracious master, the honorable veteran and centurion of the XV Apollonian Legion Caius Publius Petronius, the darling of three Caesars gloriously returned from twenty victories with sixteen scars!"

This shout resounded through the inextricable swirl of sound, carried by the lung power of an exclamator, out of the dense tangle of people. Habitually, a path opened in the crowd, which half-heartedly let pass a procession of six men, who had to thank the general distraction of curiosity that his strange appearance was only smiled at by a few.

The exclamatory slave was followed by two house slaves, behind whom visibly walked with great complaint the master whose title and dignities the crier had just proclaimed. Two other house slaves concluded the procession.

Such processions were nothing unusual, they could be encountered every hour, but the unintended comedy lay in the person of the worthy favorite of three Caesars himself. The old centurion strode along laboriously, with a convulsive strain of all his strength; the unaccustomed weight of his battle armor, which he had put on again today after long years to celebrate the imperial entry, almost pressed him to the ground. After many years of rest, where the armor had been languishing away as a showpiece in the most precious sanctuary in the Tablinum of the Petronian House, it had suddenly been brought out, carefully cleaned and carried out into the long-unseen sunlight, in order to follow its master, whom it so often accompanied into the thick of battle, adorning him today for the celebration. But more than sunbeam and armor, this and the person of the brave Centurion had been alienated from each other.

If the bile of our easily excitable brave Petronius was already boiling, the last remnant of his otherwise good mood was completely lost when he noticed that he could no longer let his beloved vine staff whistle through the air, but had to use it as a support.

Tablinum: Inner sanctuary in a Roman house. Often decorated with paintings and busts of important ancestors. **Vine Staff**: Also called a Baculum or Centurion Staff, this was a symbol of authority. It was a wooden rod with grape vines grown around it, similar to the symbol of a physician's staff. It could be legally used to beat anyone the centurion objected to. Grabbing it away from a centurion was considered a capital offense.

He bore the consequences of his vanity with dignity and tensed all his muscles to keep up a martially tight gait. His normally good-natured red round face took on a very peculiar expression, which the old centurion considered to be soldierly strict, although he was fundamentally different from it.

In the full sense of his dignity, the favorite of three emperors strode along the alley "ad Tabernas", until his little procession had reached an inn, which enjoyed the special favor of the honest veteran, because it was the Taberna to the Black Elephant. Next to the entrance gate on the left, a black elephant was painted on the wall in a most gruesome manner, while opposite it, from the gate on the right, the following inscription reconciled the painter's barbaric lack of art:

There it read:

Stranger and guest! O, consider where you stay, that you do not regret your choice of tavern,
Ceres and Bacchus united, they gladly grant you refreshment,
Pillows are there to tempt thee to rest at meal time,
Delicious roast also beckons, spicy wine from Falern!
Parus promises thee, the host, but hear also Edone, the gift-giver:
Venus grants thee gladly a charming gift-girl's kiss.
Thou must be wise, O my guest, from a polished goblet imbibe a sip.
Blissfully thy wine-swollen head lies on the singer's breast.

With a sigh of relief, the old centurion strode through the pestibulum into which the cabaret opened, where the common people were entertained, where donkey drivers and slaves noisily poured questionable wetness from clay jugs into their hardened throats. Passing this, walking lengthwise through the atrium, Petronius reached the tablinium. There, on the right, a niche showed the altar of the Lares, on which a small fire of fragrant juniper wood burned. The three small clay statuettes of Ceres, Venus and Bacchus seemed to have been blasphemously painted by the same artist who had made the elephant outside. From this tablinium a door led into the drinking room for distinguished guests, the triclinium. Since our friend Petronius knew all about this place without being asked, it can be assumed that he had often sacrificed here to the patron gods of the place.

The walls of the triclinium were covered with knitted colorful wallpaper, the windows were closed with green glass panels set in lead, and the dining beds were set up in the form of a horseshoe open to the entrance in such a way that they could be climbed on from the sides of the walls. These dining beds were not made of wood or metal, as in private houses, but of compact

Lares: A household god. Roman houses often had an altar of deities especially for that house or family. These were sometimes gods of a pantheon, or revered ancestors. **Ceres**: Roman goddess of agriculture. **Venus**: Roman goddess of beauty. **Bacchus**: Roman god of wine and dance.

masonry, covered with soft pillows, over which colorful blankets were folded, so that the solid construction of the beds appeared pleasantly veiled to the eye. The inner room of the horseshoe was furnished with small three-legged round tables, one of which was intended only for each guest and was placed in front of him only after he had settled comfortably into the cushions of the dining bed.

With a gruff "Salve", Petronius entered the triclinium. His greeting might otherwise have sounded more friendly, but today he had put on a different person with the armor; it was good, therefore, that the drinking room was almost empty. With the help of his favorite slave Patroclus, the favorite of three Caesars sank into the cushions without removing his armor; he only took off his helmet. He placed it next to him in the cushions, for he only wanted to refresh himself with a small drink, and then resume his wanderings through the city. Now a gift-girl stepped lightly into the drinking room; she must have known the guest, for with an almost mocking smile she examined his warlike adornment and pressed her beads to his head, to which she mindlessly babbled the usual formula of greeting. It went: "Let it be well with thee, O guest, in the house of Edone the Duchess; rest and refreshment are granted by the friendly ladies of the house." The old centurion's lips played a cozy smirk as he growled the girl's greeting, but she deftly dodged the caresses intended for her with a giggle and scurried out of the chamber. Petronius, however, was not annoyed by this obvious disregard for his patronage, but understandingly raised the cut glass goblet to his mouth, which the girl had placed on one of the three-legged tables in front of him, and took a deep draught from it, heavy with its contents. The ruby sparkling wine of the goblet was obtained from the grapes, which were pressed on the slopes next to Aquae*, where the warm sulfur springs gave the wine a sweet and lovely fragrance.

Amusedly, our friend clicked his tongue, raised the goblet once more, let the light play through the polished surfaces as he slowly turned it, and set it down for a second deep drink, fixing his eyes over the rim of the cup, scrutinizing the others present. At the lower end of the resting bed, to the centurion's right, on the window side of the chamber, lay a man with long-curled hair and full long goatee, both like his bushy eyebrows of glossy blue-black, disheveled and carelessly kept. Eerily the unsteady deep-set eyes sparkled from their sockets, while a sharply cut vulture nose and starkly cast lips, which, half-opened, revealed oversized yellow teeth, at once marked him as an Oriental. His repulsive nature was not lessened by the deliberately neglected suit, which consisted of a worn tunic barely reaching above the

*Today, "Aquae" is known as Baden, near Vienna.

knees, with a simple belt, and a brown woolen coat that lay slipped from his shoulders on the floor of the drinking room. He had neither shoes nor sandals, and his clothes showed that he wanted to represent a philosopher, while his demeanor betrayed just the opposite. The stranger was one of those pseudo-philosophers who, in the days of the decline of the classical cults, fulfilled the need of the rich for a kind of religion by soothing their often restless consciences with philosophical-sounding phrases, serving them as advisors and doctors of the soul, and in a certain sense playing the role that was given to the so-called "castle monks" in the German Middle Ages about a millennium later. It was fashionable to keep one's own philosopher, who of course, according to fashion, had to be a Greek. That these gentlemen, the more they increased in number, became the more insubstantial, that it became proverbial to speak of their "beautiful teachings and bad afterlife", that many failed existences reached for the dress of the philosopher, this and many other disgraceful things in its wake finally caused the general contempt of that kind of philosopher. It explains therefore also the dislike of our Centurion against the guest unwelcome to him in this place.

Reluctantly, the honest warrior turned away from the juggler. His gaze touched an exceedingly lovely apparition, which had completely escaped him before.

At the other end of the resting bed, facing the philosopher in a semi-crouching position, sat a young flute player, a pretty blond girl of barely sixteen, in a simple white tunic without sleeves, which showed off her beautiful full arm in its dazzling whiteness. A broad colorful embroidered belt embraced as if cosseted the slender supple figure, whose classical symmetry was only the more nobly emphasized by the unadorned folding of the simple, almost transparent garment, just as the dazzling white of her little feet appeared only the more snowy by the dark red straps of the sandals.

She played a simple melancholy tune. With downcast eyes she sat, and over her highly flushed cheeks furtive tears seemed to trickle down from her long lashes.

Our good centurion, astonished, enraptured by the noble beauty of the flute-player, suddenly forgot all the sufferings and discomforts of his embarrassing position; his heart beat warmer in brisker beats. Half unconsciously he lay speechless on the pillows, the rosary on his head soon shifting from ear to ear. He felt wonderful pity for the poor frightened child, whereupon he cast a long inquiring glance over at the pseudo-philosopher. But what this one glance announced to him, drove the bright flames of anger over his handsome old face.

Rummaging in his curly locks with his left hand, ruffling and disheveling his rosary, convulsively clutching the cup with his right hand, which he always filled anew and poured down into his almost insatiable gullet, the philosopher stretched himself in the cushions of the dining bed, half intoxicated by wine,

half by sensuality. With twitching nostrils and half-opened lips he let his bared teeth be seen like a predator, a convulsive trembling quivered through his whole body, while he seemed to want to absorb the dainty figure of the flute-player with lustful glances.

Suddenly he raised himself with difficulty to a more seated position, and began in a sickeningly croaking voice one of those songs which occasionally resounded at the wildest orgies during the Floralia.

The song - if it may still be called so under such circumstances - sounded thus:

Your dearest face
Black veils do not cover;
Your round arm, your little foot small,
They shine mild as ivory.
Only your body beautiful and tender
You hide cruel and hard from me.
I am not willing to tolerate
The sacrilege any longer,
Show yourself, like Venus, unveiled,
Let thy garment quickly fall.

The pallor of death covered the face of the girl, who sat rigid and mute, as if looking into the open jaws of a panther, while the drunkard made an appearance to pounce on the unfortunate. But then the patience of the honest centurion had reached its end; with genuine martial brevity and coarseness he burst out rumblingly into the words: "Stop, cowardly scoundrel! By unconquered Mithras, tell what a wretch you are!? Where are the stakes of shame on which you are flogged?! - Surely you do not pay homage to Momus, so tell me, what deception covers your dishonorable dress!? - Speak, fellow, if thy life be more to thee than a toad's!"

The brave Petronius in his shining armor appeared to the frightened child like a saving god; in spite of his gray head she thought she saw in him the dear hero Helgi, of whom her mother so often told how he freed the king's daughter! O beautiful days of childhood in the proud royal hall of the father, where are you!? Now she is a poor slave who plays the flute for the amusement of the guests of her beastly mistress! Tears stifled her words, only one look from her sea-blue fairy-tale eyes, in which she put all her sorrow, all her misery, but also all her unlimited gratitude more eloquently than in words, she sent so intimately to her savior that he himself remained almost

Mithras: Mysterious secret Roman religion, known only by carvings. The religion of Mithras was possibly similar to Freemasonry today. It was an anti-Christian cult; there is a Mithra in the Rig Veda of India and a Mithra in Zoroastrianism. It is unknown if Roman Mithraism is related to these deities or not.

speechless; then she jumped up like a frightened deer and hurried out of the door with flying robes.

The philosopher gazed into the wrathful face of Petronius with a stare of glass. The latter also gave him time to collect himself, so that at last the stranger's features revived, assumed a sad expression, and he broke out into the words:

"O, my brave, noble Centurion! Thou knowest well the philosopher's dress which I wear, and yet askest who I am? Why should I be denied what is permitted to you and others? Only because the state provides for you an estate, and for others their trade, but for me neither of the two?"

Now Petronius forgot about the plan to have only a short drink. He had counted on resistance or cowardly flight; instead, he found his opponent impervious to invective and prepared for a war of words. After all, he himself had practiced rhetoric in his youth. He wanted to devote himself to the civil service, but remained - how it came, he hardly knew himself to interpret - with the Legion, until he was retired as a veteran with a nice little house in Carnuntum. Yes, the years came and went, so he grew old before he realized it. His friends held high offices in the administration of provinces, but he had missed the opportunity and had to consider himself lucky to live a modest veteran's life with little wealth.

Now old memories were awakened within him, the lawyer stirred belligerently within him, he thought to come down hard on his opponent with spoken violence and to smash him to the ground with the sharpest logic. Nevertheless, he was smart enough not to deny the soldier, so as not to renounce the familiar ground in battle. In a short, crude way he proved that the miserable verbiage of pseudo-philosophy is not worth a denarius because it bears its fruits. Useful striving finds its reward everywhere, the jurist, the soldier finds this in the civil service, other trades nourish themselves through useful work everywhere in the country, only the purposeless talking, which creates no benefit for anyone, would therefore also bring no reward, just as no vine would sprout from sown donkey clods. Therefore, the other could not be a philosopher either, because firstly, such a philosopher had no money and secondly, he could not live so sybaritically, which, by the way, was not the philosopher's way at all, which is why, fourthly, the opponent was not a philosopher at all, but could only be a tramp and a rogue. Our good centurion paused and, infinitely satisfied, raised the sparkling cup to the height of his mouth. The pseudo-philosopher had to be beaten, so Petronius also wanted to take a deep triumphant drink.

"O, Zeno! o, Crates! What a mistake! You do not know me, me, the philosopher Aristippus Dercylides!?" cried the other, showing immense astonishment, though a faunish smile played lightly around the corners of his mouth.

The drink of triumph remained un-drunk. Petronius stared at the philosopher in amazement and slowly lowered the raised cup again. Aristipp noticed this with amusement; he took the deep drink of satisfaction instead of his opponent. Nevertheless, he had triumphed too soon, for when Petronius had recovered from his astonishment, he angrily uttered the words, "Villain, you lie! I never met faces like yours in Athens or Olympia, but I did in Antioch and Alexandria. You are not a Greek!"

The faunish tug around the corners of Aristipp's mouth only became all the more pronounced when he now replied in seemingly obsequious speech: "High sir! Why should I not be a Greek? Go, ask the lictors of our exalted Proconsul, to whom fate may grant wisdom and wealth and bless the future with good fortune, whether I am not the philosopher Aristippus Dercylides!" In the course of his speech, during which our good Petronius became more and more eerie, Aristippus now told how, at the Proconsul's request, he was preparing the condemned Cetronius Cupitianus for death.

At the mention of this name, the centurion involuntarily shuddered; he knew enough. Cetronius was a rival of the Proconsul, he wanted to oust him from his position, but had been defeated and condemned to death. The Proconsul Maximianus had misgivings about having the death penalty carried out on Cetronius because of his many followers; he therefore used Aristipp to persuade Cetronius to commit suicide. However, an unauthenticated legend crept through Carnunt, according to which Aristipp might have been more helpful to the cowardly Cetronius in his suicide in the prison than he wanted to be. Since one did not dare to say this publicly, the persuasion of the Aristipp was considered the victor over the cowardice of Cetronius, but his power fell short of the glory it deserved. With cynical pleasure Aristipp now gloated over the disgruntlement of the centurion, who realized that he had encountered a creature of the Proconsul, which could be very dangerous to have as an enemy. He had to try to mitigate the fatal collision. While he pondered how this could be done, the other, feeling victorious, continued to talk glowingly about his success with Cetronius. That he paid no less attention to the cup than to the description of his work is self-evident. Petronius, on a good occasion, made a remark which was intended to conciliate Aristippus by admitting that philosophy, as he had now learned, could also be useful to the state; indeed, he showed himself completely enthusiastic about the idea that a

Lictor: Bodyguard for the Magistrate, the Roman law. The Lictors carried the Fasces, a bundle of sticks with an axe head, and protected the Magistrate and carried out his punishments as needed. Romans carried out law very quickly; an appointed Magistrate roamed the city at all times, with the Lictors as bodyguards. He would arrive on the scene of a dispute and often adjudicate it on the spot. Imagine a judge travelling with a group of police officers who would carry out punishment on the scene, and that was how a great deal of Roman law was conducted.

Proconsul: Direct representative of the Caesar, usually as administrators of large colonies.

free man should fall only by himself, and praised Aristippus's power of speech, which had been able to drive Cetronius to such a high conception of his doctrine. Nevertheless, he angrily mumbled into his cup the word sycophant, which might not have been meant in a flattering sense for the philosopher at all, since otherwise he would have trusted it to him and not to the cup. Aristipp, delighted by his victory, drank on and on, his chatter becoming more and more confused, and Petronius was already about to leave the chamber when a new guest became visible under the door.

The one who entered seemed to be an old man and yet a young man again, despite his gray broad beard and silver curls. One of his fire-eyes shone in the blue glow of the summer sky, the other was hidden under his slouch hat, so that one could not decide whether he was looking at it or missing it. His giant figure, towering over other men by more than a head's length, was completely wrapped in a blue, gray-spotted cloak. Immobile, leaning on his long staff, he stood in the doorway like a stone image. Caught by the spell of this sudden awe-inspiring apparition, both the philosopher and the centurion remained spellbound in speechless amazement. Slowly, solemnly, as if he floated, the mysterious man entered the triclinium without greeting those present, even without having a glance for them. He took the seat where the flute player had recently left. The noble majesty that surrounded his whole being, the uncanny dignified calm, with his almost poor clothing, confused and calmed at the same time, they forced the observer demonically down to his feet as if in adoration, in order to lift him up as if to the breast of a loving father. Now the flute player reappeared under the door, with a full cup in her left hand and a rosary in her right. Dejectedly she spoke the greeting: "Let it be well with you, O guest, in the house", then she had fallen silent; her timidly raised eye had seen the guest. A tremor shook her humbly bent body, the wreath of half-blossomed roses slid down to the earth. While her right hand unconsciously pressed against her violently throbbing heart, the goblet, offered to the guest by her trembling left hand, spilled its contents.

But soon she had overcome the first impression of the overwhelming sight. Her large blue child's eye shone ever more joyfully and transfigured, her bosom heaved mightily, she proudly straightened herself upward, as if the breath of divine glory, which flooded around the wonderful man, refreshed her soul, as if it lifted her with heavenly power from the dull prison night, in which her spirit had languished until that moment; for she, too, the poor flute-playing slave, now shone like him in unapproachable regal majesty, almost divine.

Now she bent her knee before him. Not humbly like a slave, no, like a goddess who pays homage to a god. With spiritual face, firm, calm eye raised to him, she now handed him the half-emptied goblet, jubilantly offering him welcome with fiery word:

"Gisalhild greets thee, O Eticho, the mighty ancestor of her proud race,

whom she may call by a human name, whom others revere as Wuotan! I give thanks, Gerlind, you first mother of my tribe, that you heard the anguished call of your offended grandchild, that you, O honorable one, moved the most holy father of gods and men to a saving act in love!"

The thus addressed one, like a marble image, remained sitting motionless in unchanged position; the left hand held the staff like a world-devouring scepter, the right hand hovered as if blessing over the golden curls of the girl.

Now the answer sounded in the fullest chest tone of the enigmatic: "Little maiden, keep your word! I never called myself by a name, but I do not want you to call me Wuotan; where Herian's helmet, where do Geri and Freki, the wolves of the winds, growl around the magician, where are Thought and Memory, the murmuring ravens, where Balmung the sword, where Gungnir the Spear? Therefore keep your word! Eticho, foreboding me, shows nearer the goal; but call Erchantaug this old man, who so old, that the oak forest at Stilifrida he saw three times, how young he was and aged again. Therefore do not despair, grief-stricken child, Erchantaug leads you to the hall of the father, Herian himself hears this oath!"

Joyfully the maiden rose, and taking Erchantaug's hand and pressing it to her heart with tender affection, she spoke the words: "Hear me, Erchantaug, a rune-knowing maiden! It is never fitting for the maiden to turn back Thy word, Thou hast spoken it, it is my law; but notice: Gisalhild of Gambin, the noblest king's child, she knows Thy names, she knows Thy mantle, the gray-cloudy blue vault of heaven, she knows Thy cloud-hat, which covers the top of the holy Hechsa mountain, she knows Thy staff, the bestower of wishes, she knows these three wishing things very well, she honors Thee as a wish-granting God. She knows Thee by the name of Erchantaug, which calls Thee to me as the 'swift-working one', therefore grant me also to honor Thee joyfully, consecrating myself, as Wabetrud, the mighty giant, did it, as Agnarr did it to Thee, the king's son, whom Thou approached as Grimnir! Take then, O mighty one, from Gisalhild's hands the refreshing drink of welcome!"

Erchantaug emptied the cup. Then he raised the girl and gently placed her next to him in the cushions.

How proudly, with softening majesty, the royal maiden now sat on the same place where she had recently sat playing the flute as a slave. Now she knew that the bondage had been broken, royal nobility had been poured over her figure, her being, she felt transformed, uplifted, she knew neither fear nor timidity anymore, she felt under divine protection! Petronius was also confused. He hardly dared to believe his eyes. Gradually, however, he regained his composure, the feeling of offended ambition irritated the "darling of three Caesars", so that he decided to let the stranger, who did not pay attention to him at all, feel the importance of his person. But an eerie trepidation made his voice unsteady, only with difficulty he fought this anxious feeling by addressing the words to Erchantaug: "By the victorious Mithras! Stranger, you are bold!

You seem to be a Teuton, ignorant of our customs and traditions! How did you come to the city? Do not forget our 'Cave canem!' You may charm this poor girl, but with me jugglers and jesters have no value! Who are you? What is your trade in Carnunt? This declare!"

Gisalhild had only a look of pity for Petronius, whereupon she raised her sea-blue child's eye to Erchantaug, who seemed to sit completely motionless, even impassive, as if the speech had not been meant for him. Petronius, puzzled by this, but also not a little irritated, believing that the stranger was at a loss for an answer, continued in a fiercer tone: "By my Baculus, speak up, or I'll hand you over to the prefecture in a bound! Answer, who are you?"

Erchantaug even now persisted in his marble calm. He slowly and surely took hold of the girl, whom he lifted onto his lap with playful ease like a child, folding the wide cloak around her, which now completely covered both of their figures. His head seemed to sink to his chest, making his face, completely hidden by the broad hat, invisible; also Erchantaug, presumably to hold the girl, had retracted his left arm and therefore leaned the staff against his armpit.

This conspicuous mockery of his military dignity, as well as of his Baculus, caused our renowned centurion no small annoyance; he almost seethed with anger and rage, fought senselessly and excitedly with his staff in the air and was initially incapable of any decision. With difficulty he muttered the name of his slave, while he convulsively clenched his fist around the handle of the Baculus. The slave had not yet entered when from the tablinium a shrieking woman's voice rang into the triclinium: "Lydia, Lydia, you child of a toad and a mischievous monkey! Where are you? Your back shall repay me for this outrage!"

Already a small round woman appeared under the door, with a greasy face and a mean expression, wielding a bulky leather scourge in her ringed right hand. She was exaggeratedly pompously dressed; in the brightest colors with heavy gold embroidery shone her silken robe, which showed her charms more than it concealed them. She wanted to appear more distinguished than the most distinguished women; she flaunted her wealth with heavy gold jewelry, but the most drastic effect came from the exaggerated movements of her body, exaggerated to the point of caricature, which she had once learned from a wandering comedian and now complacently produced always at inopportune times.

Only now did she notice the presence of guests, restrained the course of her tongue, which until now had uninhibitedly manifested its excitement, made a ridiculous bow and spoke the greeting of welcome: "Be at ease, guests -"

"Stop your chatter, Schenkin!" blurted out the Centurion. "Call my slaves, the fellows have tasted their ears! Call Patroclus!"

Schenkin: A wine server or tavern owner.

"Your wish is my slave's command, O brave legate!" replied the Schenkin with a bittersweet smile, which fully contorted her grease-glistening broad face into a grimace. Already she was about to depart to obey the order, when Patroclus appeared at the threshold.

"Patroclus, my lad," his master addressed him eagerly, "take heed of this rascal, by the victorious Mithras, a scout and murderer. Occupy all the gates, fetch the Aedile. Haste, miss nothing!"

"Patroclus hastens, as his gracious lord and master commands," replied the latter, and was about to depart.

"Stay!" cried Petronius to him, "stay, give the order to Sanga; but you help me leave the bed of rest, and put on my helmet."

Swiftly Sanga, the centurion's second slave, was dispatched to the Aedile. Patroclus, with much difficulty, raised his master from the resting bed, quickly arranged the latter's warlike exterior, and at last crowned the whole with the helmet.

While this was going on with great gentleness for Petronius, whereby the prudent Patroclus knew well how to conceal all the weaknesses of his master, the Schenkin stood there as if petrified. She still had no idea what was happening in her house, she might not have a clear conscience, or was it just the sudden fright of facing the all-powerful Aedil soon? In short, she was beside herself. House search, pillory, flogging and similar awful fates floated before her frightened soul. Quickly she drew up plans for her rescue. She wanted to offer the beautiful Lydia, the flute player, as a gift to the young Marcellianus, the son of the Proconsul, in order to have support from the young gentleman to whom she had already rendered so many services.

All her plans, which sprang up in a flash, had not yet reached maturity, when the centurion came rattling and clattering his weapons toward her, pompously displaying the most serious official air. Now the frightened woman almost completely lost her senses; in her agony she threw herself on the ground in front of the terrible man, embracing his knees with a piteous expression, kissing the hem of his tunic, she cried out in the highest affect:

"Most grand, most gracious legate and prefect! Have mercy on me, poor, honest servant! I do not yet know what crime you accuse me of; but I am innocent, by the mighty fathers of my house! Mercy, have mercy, great-favored tribune, my highly wealthy protector!"

With a feeling of infinite satisfaction the centurion stood before the woman bathed in tears; crossing his arms over his breast, he looked down proudly upon her. Though the titles not due him were most welcome incense to his boastfulness, he felt far from sated. Instead of soothing the Schenkin's anxiety, he sought to increase it to its highest peak.

Aedile: A top elected authority in Roman government. Generally in charge of public festivals and managing the economy of a city or province.

After he had had his fill of the wailing, hand-wringing woman, he paced up and down the chamber, proudly raising his head and speaking the words: "By the unconquered Mithras! I, your protector? I the protector of a house of brigands, murderers and arsonists!? Who is this one, old woman? Whom you hospitably host, who dares to mock me, the Centurion Caius Publius Petronius of the Fifteenth Apollonian Legion, the favorite of three emperors, who dares to insult me by refusing greeting and reply!? Aren't you for the goddess Edone? Is this tavern not yours? Have you handed over this suspect to the Aedile, as is your duty?! Wicked woman, do you know what awaits you? No? I, the old, undefeated soldier, say, yes even, swear to you by the invincible Mithras, that the crucifix is already waiting for you - like the tree of the ripening fruit! But before that, your embroidered robes will be ripped off, you will be whipped, so that you will no longer need to paint your old face young with the purple shining juice of the sea shell, as true as my name is Petronius!"

"Mercy, my lord and king!" wailed the gift-girl, "mercy, what can I do for my guests and for this one, who has never come under my eyes, who is as strange to me as the king of the Parthians! But allow me, O darling of Mars, to remove myself to call my husband's slaves, to whom the man shall speak!" With that she rose. She tried to win the door, but Petronius prevented her from doing so. He seized her by the arm, cast a wrathful glance at her, and cried, "By Mithras victorious! Woman, you will not escape me! Stay, I say, if thou wilt not die by this sword! I was not the favorite of three deified emperors for nothing, to see through thy wiles; thou wilt make appointments to deceive me and the Aedile! Silence, await your fate!"

Annihilated, the trembling Schenkin stood there while pompously the old Centurion paced up and down, expecting a new attack. Then she composed herself somewhat and strode once more toward Petronius, saying, "My brave prefect! Your wish is your slave's irresistible command, nor will I depart, nor speak to anyone, for I know by the all-seeing Jupiter that I am free from all blame; but remember that I am a nun and must care for you, O my dear guest! Therefore, allow me to offer you a jug full of the noblest, unmixed Massik wine, as a sign of my submissiveness. The ornate silver amphora that encloses it, I ask you to consider as your own," she bowed deeply, while she let inquiring glances glide from under the lowered lashes over the face of the surprised Centurion, who, unaware of such an attack, could hardly suppress a satisfied smirk. Quickly he glanced at the philosopher. Gaining from the latter's deep breaths the conviction that Aristipp had succumbed to the power of wine, he could not resist the lure of such a rare and precious drop as the Massian was, which usually graced the table only of the richest of the rich. His

Massic Wine: The finest wine of Rome, from Mount Massicus in the area of Naples, Italy.

Amphora: The distinctive Roman wine jug, commonly made of fired clay, uncommonly of ceramic or even precious metal.

face assumed the expression of the most benevolent patronage, saying, "By victorious Mithras! Schenkin, your advice is good; I will allow you to serve me the amphora, but do not forget that you promised me unmixed massic! Make haste, that thou mayest soon be at hand again; I will believe in thy innocence and be thy advocate."

Quickly Edone had perceived her advantage; she sighed with relief. With a mischievous smile, she hurriedly left the triclinium.

In the anticipation of a rare pleasure, the bland centurion resumed his place on the dining bed. He had hardly managed this with the help of Patroclus, when Edone appeared with two cute gift-girls, who carried the massif in artfully crafted silver amphora, as well as a splendid goblet and ladle of the same metal.

Edone personally served the first cup to her guest, performing her most adventurous body contortions, believing that this would completely defeat the already half-won veteran. She also spoke a beautifully turned toast. All this, however, was superfluous for the wine-loving centurion and remained completely unappreciated by him. Otherwise, this would have offended Edone immensely, but today she was more mild-mannered against the disdain for her arts. With pleasure she even noticed that Petronius gave the heavy Massic the precedence in his estimation, even seemed to sink devoutly as in a prayer into his cup. She beckoned with significant looks to the raven-haired Sophrona, who seized a kithara and struck a few chords. The other girl, the glowing-eyed Doria, sang the following drinking song:

The dark earth drinks,
From her army of trees,
They drink from the streams of the sea,
The sun drinks from the sea:
From the shine of the sun
The moon drinks its moist light:
Therefore drink, my happy reveler,
And count not the cups!

This little song had hardly died away when the dark-eyed singer sank into the cushions at the centurion's side, wrapped her full arm around his neck and began a dangerous game of fire eyes with him. This Greek fire had a different effect on Petronius today than it had about three decades ago; it no longer ignited, but it warmed and increased his love for the cup to a considerable degree.

Edone stood at a respectful distance, keenly observing, but wisely

Kithara: A Roman version of a lyre. The root word of the modern guitar.

refrained from addressing a word to Petronius; he could not be disturbed at any price.

Petronius, who had been victorious in many a wine battle, had no argument; the sweet wine slipped down so easily, so flatteringly, the soft velvet paws of the gift-girls, their fiery kisses, confused him so completely that, dissolved in the most perfect bliss, he forgot everything around him.

Then a noise was heard from the courtyard. The duchess flinched involuntarily and cast an inquiring glance at the blessed reveler, whose wine-filled countenance completely reassured her.

Now the door opened, in which, accompanied by two lictors, the Aedile in the state toga became visible. With the help of his favorite slave, the veteran rose with difficulty from the camp and, fighting down the effects of the wine with iron willpower, strode toward the dreaded official. The Aedile stepped into the middle of the drinking room, speaking the formula: "In the name of Roman law, I, Numenius Papus Licinius, the Aedile, summon you Centurion and veteran Caius Publius Petronius to present your complaint."

This Petronius did with the greatest possible respect for his dignity, in beautifully composed words, which flowed from his lips in slow speech, since his tongue, as if swollen by the sweet Massic, was almost unable to speak fluently. Nevertheless, he did not forget any of the essential points in the enumeration of the known events, nor the word given to the Schenkin to be her advocate; he warmly commended her to the "upholder of Roman law," even going so far as to advocate a reward from the treasury for the valiant woman, since she had shown such excellent care for the safety and welfare of the colony. - With this tremendous effort the strength of the honorable veteran was also exhausted. Keeping all the usual forms, Patroclus conducted his master back to the dining-bed, where he again bedded him in the pillows; all this was accomplished quickly and safely, so that Edone perceived with a satisfied smile how admirably her cunning had proved.

To the Aedile she exhausted her entire stock of artful phrases for her verbose description of the events, and accompanied the rhetorical exemplary performance with the most delicate curtsies and devotional sways of her short figure. She also called the Aedile prefect, king, and the emperor's confidant, assured him that she would have his name written in purple over her Lares, that she would offer him an incense offering every day, and indulged in all the exaggerations that had become second nature to her.

This scene, like the earlier ones, passed by the enigmatic cloak-bearer without effect; motionless, he still sat on the same spot as if he were an image made of stone. Now the Aedile approached him with solemn seriousness and spoke: "In the name of Roman law and the power granted to me by the emperor and the gods! Speak to me, stranger! I demand it now!"

But just as motionless as before, the addressed remained now. The Aedile demanded answer for the second, for the third time, with equal success. Then

he touched him with his golden staff and spoke the words: "Stranger! Now you are a slave to the law, body and soul! Up, Lictors, bind him!"

At these words half a dozen armored men rushed into the chamber to give aid to the Lictors, who were grabbing Erchantaug.

The lictor, seizing him by the cloak, recoiled with a sudden shock, for the long staff of the spooky man struck the floor with a loud thud, the hat rolled to the ground, and the cloak sank back into the pillows. But there, where one thought to see Erchantaug and the flute-player sitting, there stood two sheaves of straw, while no trace remained of the two themselves.

Everyone stared speechlessly at the sheaves of straw, abrupt amazement paralyzed their movement, and Petronius, who had been almost stunned by tears only a few moments before, was completely sobered by the shock. Without the help of his slave, jumping from the lectus with the almost youthful strength of a manipulus, he marveled at the two straw sheaves as if he had never seen such things in his life, as if they were the strangest showpieces from the fabulous land of Aethiopia.

Edone also looked at the sheaves with a frightened expression, but she was the first to come to her senses and move. Enraged like a bull of the arena running at the red robe, she pounced on the smaller sheaf, shrieking, with fingers splayed out like claws, tearing at it, tussling and tugging at it, and acting like mad.

"This is the Teutonic slave, my Lydia! Which I bought for ten thousand sesterces", she cried in a shrieking half-choked voice, feverishly shaking the innocent straw. High and dear she swore never again to buy such barbaric changelings. All of them were as unruly as their unpronounceable names; she would rather buy red wigs for other dark-haired women than acquire such vicious red-haired Germanic women who defied the orders of their mistress, as if what she demanded with full right was shameful! "Just you wait, you Unkentochter!" screeched the hag, "stalk by stalk I will burn you one by one, it will last longer than a year, and so long shall your death throes last, you dazzling mud lizard, you!" With that, the furious woman, greedy as if they were pieces of gold, collected the stalks and pieces of straw, which she had scattered in about the courtyard, from the ground, and left the drinking room with senseless bawling. This time she forgot to make her departure more pleasant for the guests with dainty bows.

Not only Edone believed that magic was involved, but also the Aedile and Petronius seemed to be of this belief; likewise the lictors and soldiers present were as firmly convinced of it as of their own existence.

The Aedile as well as Petronius quickly pulled out small amulets cut from coral, representing closed fists, the thumb of which was stuck through

Lectus: another Roman word for couch or bed. **Manipulus**: a young soldier. **Unkentochter**: an unwanted daughter. **Sesterces**: small silver Roman coin, worth about USD $1.

between the index and middle finger, so that they formed a so-called fig. This amulet was held out to the ghostly sheaves of straw with the right hand, while the left shaded the eyes, as if they had just been blinded by sudden light.

The lictors and municipal guards, who were not in possession of such precious amulets, either made this sign, as it was cut in the coral, with their own right hand, or made another counteracting magic gesture. This consisted in holding the fan-like opened right hand with the thumbs to the tip of their nose, but with the opposite little finger pointing in the direction where the dangerous object was. The lack of the red color, which so powerfully inhibits every spell, they replaced by sticking out their tongues as far as possible from an open mouth.

With the exception of the sleeping Aristipp, as well as the two gift-girls, who had fled from the chamber right at the beginning, all present had practiced this counter-magic. Yes, the Aedile now gave a myriad of instructions to his people on how to escort the sorcerer - the bundle of straw, that is - and to keep him in the prison, so that the straw would not change back into the sorcerer and he would be able to escape. No straw, no piece of clothing, not even the wand of the sorcerer was allowed to touch the ground, because only from this touch could the sorcerer draw the power to change back. Therefore, everything had to be put into a well-cleaned brazen cauldron, which, hanging in chains, was to be carried by the soldiers suspended above the ground and thus also hung from the ceiling of a prison cell.

The lictors and soldiers did as they were told. In a few moments a strange procession started to move. In front with the fasces walked the lictors, then two men of the municipal guard, who carried the brazen cauldron on their lances over their armpits, while the rest of the crew surrounded it or concluded the procession.

After the procession had left the tavern, the Aedile strode towards Petronius and stopped in front of him. Smiling mischievously, he swayed his head back and forth, which did not seem to agree with his solemn dignity of before, nor with his state toga, and broke out into the words: "What, by my blind goddess, fellow, are you up to! By all the Olympian gods, had we not been such good comrades in our Apollinarian, as was told of Castor and Pollux, had we not both been fraternized by Mithras, the fun would have turned nasty for you! Or do you think I hold true that the bundle of straw is that rascal?! Edone is innocent, I see that, the daredevil has kidnapped her slave, which, by the way, was not difficult, if one is so opulent as friend Petronius, and drinks unmixed wine, sweetened by beautiful gift-girl caresses, if one is so oblivious of duty as this very clean friend Petronius, not even to offer his friend and brother a welcoming cup!"

"By the never-missing sword of Mithras!" replied the centurion with a heavy tongue, "friend and brother Licinius, come hither to my side and drink!

Such divine nectar have you not in the municipality! Had you asked me to guest through your lictors, you would surely have refreshed me with a far worse drop! By the way, you are doing me serious harm; may I then ask the Aedile to be my guest? for as such, and not as brother Licinius, you entered here, as such you were greeted by me, as such you greeted me!"

The Aedile, who seemed to be in a particularly good mood today, stretched out in the cushions beside his old brother-in-arms, not lacking in manifold expletives to annoy him. Soon he found the worthy veteran threatening to swell out of his armor like a soaked bath sponge out of an ointment tin, then he again admired the armorer's art, for a poor craftsmans' work should have burst long ago. He knew more of the same; but today, against habit, the otherwise easily excited favorite of three Caesars was not to be stirred up. The mischievous Licinius had to paint with stronger colors. Relying on his friend's exaggerated anxiety, he resumed with the cause of his coming, letting it be guessed that he believed nothing less than that there was a spell here, but rather suspected that another secret one was at work, which could possibly be brought into closer relation to the silver amphora and its delicious contents. That was all it took to put Petronius in the highest fear. As quickly as his wavering mood allowed him to do so, he brought up all the reasons that would prove his innocence, and repeatedly attempted to reconcile his tormentor with the incomparable Traut wine. But although he was not able to offer him a filled cup for a long time, a friendly star ensured that he, but not Licinius remained the one laughed at, although the role of the laughing man should be reserved for others than the favorite of three emperors.

The kithara player, like the singer, had in the meantime re-entered and offered Licinius the wreath of roses and a goblet full of fragrant Massic, whereby the fun-loving Aedile, distracted from his victim, now turned his attention to the two lovely girls.

Dorias had wound the wreath of fragrant roses around the forehead of the "Guardian of Roman law". With this action it was inevitable that the hot breath from her maliciously smiling mouth fanned the powerful man and he was allowed glimpses into the wide-folded outer garment which bent over him, which intoxicated him even sooner than the white wine wetting his lips.

With confused senses, he wanted to pull the girl to him, but she nimbly evaded him and with his smile slipped away from his embrace. Smiling, he again threatened the singer with his finger, but he assured her that if it should happen that she would get a whip, he would give it to her in his own person as a proof of his greatest honor.

The two friends laughed at the top of their lungs at this witty idea. The girls giggled softly, but Dorias felt not a little flattered by this extraordinary condescension of the otherwise so dreaded ruler, who knew how to strike so exceedingly jocularly the deepest note of proudest arrogance.

"Evoe! Let us be merry among merry men!" cried the Aedile. "You, Muse

Erato, give me a song, and you, Euterpe, let the lyre sound harmony. But first, both of you, whom of the nine sisters I am privileged to behold, try a drink from our castalian spring. Say, is not the nectar dull against it!? - Evoe!" -

Stormily Dorias seized the cup, put it to her full lips and emptied it in one go. Her fiery black eyes flashed sparks and her cheeks glowed; she shook her rich curls, signaled to Sophrona, and while she took hold of the strings, she began to sing this song:

Go then, you fragrant roses,
Wind yourselves sweetly into wreaths
Around Licinius' soft curls,
That shine with sweet nard!
May you always bloom around your friend,
Though long he be gray of hair,
Roses, if you wish that Venus
In her favor shall keep you!

Now she wrapped her round arms around Licinius' neck, pressed a fervent kiss to his lips, and buried her face in the soft folds of his toga.

Sophrona had wrapped her arms around the neck of the centurion, who was probably two decades older than the Aedile, and was quite indifferent to the girl's caresses, but hung all the more intimately on the rim of the cup.

"Evoe!" cried the Aedile in supreme delight, "Evoe! my lovely Erato! Give me another song, a song of drinking and kissing, of Bacchus and Eros! But drink, Dorias, yet this full goblet: as pure as this massica gold will its song then bubble to thee from thy nightingale throat! Evoe!"

Slowly she raised her little head from the folds of the toga, and, breathing fervently, drew herself up to the head of Licinius, to whom she pressed a burning kiss on the lips, but bored her moist shining eye deep into his. For a short time she remained in this position, only to spring up nimbly like a fish, whereupon Sophrona took hold of the strings. Licinius was confused. His face flushed, he tried to embrace Dorias, but the singer easily withdrew from his arms and, swaying with inimitable grace, began a seductive game with the folds of her robe. Playfully, the cleverly calculating girl knew never to cross the boundaries of the dainty, the beautiful and the decent, which only made Licinius entangle himself all the more surely in the nets of the siren.

Enraptured by the coquettish game, Licinius in the highest affect, like a tragedian, quoted the Horatian verses:

"Dear, how mayst thou so fondly show thyself in the delicious ornament of hair, Turning the folds play, under the coy fleece!?"

But Dorias had only a mischievous smile for an answer. She knew only too well that she had defeated the proud Licinius, that now he had become her

plaything, not, as he might think, she his.

Smiling, she gave a wave to Sophrona, the strings whirred in full chords, and with a bright, clear voice a song resounded, jubilant like that of the lark. If this rejoicing was not in the sense of the verses, the Aedil, who was in the throes of love, took it from this side.

His delight found no end. But the song sounded thus:

"As often as the cup sounds to thee,
Banish your worries;
What cares thee then light-hearted
Of life's torment, the morrow?
Death calls thee, wilt thou not,
Then what good is a dull face?
No, drink fire wine with joy,
Lyaeus' fair gift;
In thy cups let them be buried...
The sorrows all to the grave!"

The song had died away. Dorias rose and paced up and down the chamber, taking out a brightly painted fan from a niche in the wall and fanning herself with it to cool herself. With glowing eyes Licinius followed all her movements, forgetting even the Massic.

The valiant Petronius, on the other hand, remained faithful to Bacchus and consecrated himself with touching devotion to his silver amphora.

"Girl!" cried Licinius in a passionate tone, "well thou sip of drink, but why dost thou despise Eros by not offering him in song? hear then, Sophrona, strike the strings to my song, and then, O Dorias-Erato, thou too offer a song to the greatest of gods, the little winged rogue!"

"My high lord," replied Dorias with a merry laugh, "spare your voice, you might grow hoarse, in the state toga a bacchic song-" she did not complete the sentence, but rather closed it with a jaunty wanton laugh. The shadows that threatened to rise on Licinius's brow were warped like the light evening clouds that give way before the gilding rays of the sun, and make the gray mountain tops glow with a rose-scented breeze.

"So sound ye strings," cried Licinius. Enthusiastically waving the goblet with his right hand, he intoned this song in a strong, raspy, yet not unsympathetic voice:

"Old I may be; but I drink
More than a young man drinks;
The glass - it is to dance -
The hand as Thyrsos swings.

Hand me the tankard, thrifty one,
With fiery embers of wine
Filled to the brim!
Though I am old, yet I kiss
More than a youth kisses;
And kissing I will mount
Aboard Charon's ship.
So kiss me, my girl,
Though my curls be white,
My heart glows hot!
Though I am old, yet I sing
More than a youth sings,
And cheerful songs,
The heart is spinning around me.
Therefore by the sound of cups
I will cheer Aphrodite's beckoning
With a song."

Now he emptied the cup and called: "Now, my dear Dorias-Erato! Now you also offer your nightingale sacrifice to the eos-scented Eros, but for the time being may a cup of pearly Massic refresh you. Evoe, to you, Aphrodite's playmate!"

He handed her the cup and pulled her down to him in his lap; she let it happen willingly, resting her head on his chest, and with a graceful movement of her hand she poured the wine in a full stream into her mouth from above without spilling a drop. Now she lifted her long silky lashes. The full gleam of her dark eyes struck Licinius to the heart. He bent over her to press ardent kisses on her lips, but before he succeeded in reaching them, she had slipped away from him again gazelle-like and began anew her coquettish writhing, fanning and eye-play. Sophrona strummed a prelude and already the soft voice of Doria sounded:

"Let me to Eros, the blessed one,
Ringed with flower and wreath adorned,
Now sing a short song of praise:
He who rules over men,
Can conquer the gods themselves!"

Dorias had triumphed, she was aware. Apparently exhausted, she let herself sink into the cushions away from the group, fanning herself for cooling in an apparently careless position. From her left shoulder, the tunic slid down on the inclined arm, dazzlingly revealing a part of her full bust, over

which, like unleashed Medusa's snakes, her blue-black hair curled. Her head sank back, and behind the half-veiling lashes blazed the consuming fire of lust. Licinius quivered in all his limbs, the goblet rolled into the pillows, he sprang up, frantically rushing at the girl to press her to his flaming heart, as loud cheers came in from outside. The "Vivat! Salve! Valentinianus semper Augustus!" filled the chamber, swaying on the sound waves of the tuba fanfares, like an approaching storm roar.

The Aedile was seized by a sudden fright; blanching, he thought of his duty. With his right hand pressed to his forehead, he gazed fixedly at the siren, who seemed to take no notice of all this and remained motionless in her charming position. A slight smile played around her half-open mouth, as if she had forgotten that the one who stood before her was the almighty Aedil and she was a slave without protection or rights. She knew it only too well, how much the roles were reversed. Poor Licinius, who had hardly been allowed so much time to arrange the folding of the state toga, stood before her irresolutely like a slave who wants to catch a gracious glance from a queen. But no glance met the perplexed one from the veiled eye of Doria. Then he slowly bent over the lovely glowing figure, covered her with countless kisses and then let her gently slide back into the pillows, which she let happen all seemingly willy-nilly, without encouraging or resisting. Petronius, who in the meantime was standing on his feet again with Patroclus' help, noticed how Licinius was about to rush out of the triclinium; one look from him was enough for Patroclus to prevent this. With all haste, Patroclus unwound the rosary from the curls of the confused Aedile and in a few moments restored the latter's external dignity.

Soon the five slaves of the centurion were in order. Behind the crier Patroclus, Petronius and Licinius now strode out of the drinking room arm in arm.

So at last they stepped out through the atrium under the ghoulish monstrosity of the clumsy elephant into the "Strada ad Tabernas," out into the surging throng of people, who immediately shrank back timidly when the crier called out in a stentorian voice:

"Make way, ye citizens of Carnunt, for my gracious lords, the mighty Aedile of Carnunt, Numeum's Papus Licinius, and the honorable veteran and centurion of the XV Apollonian Legion, Caius Publius Petronius, the chosen favorite of three deified emperors!"

Chapter Two
Arrival of the Emperor

At the civil forum of the colony of Carnuntum, the people crowded in uncounted masses, piled up at the buildings and the pedestals of the statues, surging up against them like the surging salt tide at the sea's rocky reef. More tenaciously than this, however, the surge of the human tide did not sink back from the gained heights, whereby it seemed as if the colossal statue of the riding emperor Marcus Aurelius in the middle of the forum was lifted up to heaven by the human tide as if to a second apotheosis.

In front of this equestrian colossus of the deified founder of Carnuntum's greatness, on a raised stage with imperial splendor, the marquee was erected, where under a canopy carried by eagles the throne rose, surrounded by the imperial Curule seats.

The entrance to this place of celebration was marked by an imposing triumphal gate, whose pillar niches were decorated by the gilded statues of Genius and Fortuna, in front of which, each on a silver tripod, a blue sacrificial flame sent out its incense clouds from a golden libation bowl.

Genius and Fortuna, Carnuntum and Luck! How inseparably they seemed connected for nearly four centuries!

Thirteen years before the birth of the Nazarene, Tiberius and Drusus, the stepsons of Caesar Augustus, had carried the Roman eagles to the Danube and at Carnuntum, the "city in the kingdom of Noricum" (1) they made a winter camp. Emperor Hadrian elevated the civil town to a municipium; about half a decennium later Carnuntum received the rank of a colonial town with all the rights of such by Emperor Marcus Aurelius, who resided here often and

1. "Locus norici regni" in Bellejus Paterculus II, 109. Curule chair: A special folding chair reserved only for Roman dignitaries such as an Emperor, Proconsul, Consul, or Aedile. Genius was a Roman personal deity, much like a "guardian angel". Fortuna was the Roman goddess of Luck, whose statuary and indeed even worship, lasted until the 1400's.

for a long time. Now, barely two hundred years after this deified emperor, the genius and the goddess of fortune reunited to welcome the approaching emperor Valentinian, who was expected to do nothing less than push the northern border of Rome to the North Sea. Therefore Carnunt rejoiced, because like a threatening thundercloud, the full force of the Germanic tribes was gathering threateningly opposite the colony on the left, northern bank of the Danube, in the Germanic royal city of Stilifrida, so that the future was not thought of without trepidation. But the mighty Valentinian, the conqueror of the Alemannic kings Witticho and Macrian, approached to secure the Danube, as he had secured the Rhine, to build Roman fortresses of protection and defense in the territory of the defiant Quad king Gambin, just as he had powerfully erected such fortresses on Alemannic soil. Even the most fearful merchant lord of the colony left his apprehension, even the most cowardly of the effeminate patricians again felt Roman blood in his veins.----------

Roaring, inextricable shouts of joy rolled over the densely tangled clouds of people like thunder; the blare of fanfares flashed out of them like flashes of lightning, and the tenacious mass of onlookers, caught in flux, pushed and shoved like chasing clouds of stormy fury.

From the upper, western end of the spacious square, the glittering helmets and armor of the Mauritanian horsemen now shone in the glow of the noonday sun; the vanguard of the imperial procession. Slowly they wove an alley through the tangle of people. A gleaming squadron of horsemen. The white eyes sparkled wildly from the moorish heads under the shining helmets and the colorful waving cloths. The slender lances swayed in the hands of the colorfully armed sons of Mauritania, who sat boldly and daringly on their fiery, light racers, which were adorned with precious, jewel-flashed bridles and saddle blankets of lion or pardel fur. Already the top of this squadron had disappeared at the lower east end of the square in the Via Principalis cutting through it, and it had not yet reached its end; for like a glittering giant snake the cavalry column from the upper outlet of the Via Principalis still rolled across the forum. This auxiliary troop on horseback was followed by another one on foot. If that one was recruited from the African coastal countries, where the Samum rummages in the Libyan sand and the lion is hunted, this one came from the country where the bear and the wolf dwell in the forests; as those sat on lion skins on horseback, so the wolf skin served these as a doublet and the bear skin as a sagum. They were the Germanic auxiliary troops, the "Gentes Marcomanorum". They were dressed and armed similarly to Aistmuth, except that they carried a long spear called a framea. In front of them rode their centurion with his followers, twelve of them according to the Germanic custom. These twelve were more richly dressed than the rest; the influence of Roman fashion was noticeable without diminishing the character

of their armament. They carried the mighty, long and broad-bladed German battle sword, in contrast to the short Roman sword carried on the right side, on the left in the hilt, just as their helmet and shield were equipped according to Germanic custom. Also these twelve had untrimmed beard and head hair, while the barefoot Gentes Marcomanorum following them wore short trimmed full beards and at the forehead trimmed head hair. Behind the twelve-headed centurion of this type of troop, their standard bearer walked between two pipers, followed by the bright bunch. After this very strong auxiliary cohort, the Legions, the actual regular imperial troops in their bright iron armor, marched up, an almost endless line of cohorts with their eagles and vexilla, now and then interrupted only by an array of heavy armored horsemen. Now followed a procession of twelve lictors of the Proconsul, dressed in red and silver, behind whom followed the Proconsul himself with his officials and councilors, joined by the knights, magistrates, decurions, aediles and the veterans from the rank of centurions upwards, as well as all the rest who thought they were indispensable to receive the emperor.

Now, dressed in shining gilded armor and weapons with the purple sagum, followed the guard of the Praetorians, the bodyguard of the Emperor, whose commander held the highest military rank, the dignity of the Minister of War.

After twenty-four imperial lictors dressed in purple, the majestic figure of the emperor became visible from afar.

On a triumphal chariot covered all over with gold and silver reliefs, drawn by a splendid quadriga of spotless white Spanish steeds, stood the emperor in shining gold armor, the imperial cloak around his shoulders, the laurel wound around his helmet, in majestic glory; -every inch an emperor! Behind the chariot followed in a shining procession the highest dignitaries, whereupon praetorians and lictors concluded the actual procession, which was still followed in a long line by the cortege.

Silent silence lay over the Forum.

Now the proud four-horse team steered in under the triumphal arch. Tubas blared their fanfares and the Proconsul shouted in a powerful voice: "Hail to thee, serene Caesar Valentinianus semper Augustus! Hail and greetings in Upper Pannonia! Hail to thee and salute in the Marcus Aurelian colony of Carnuntum!"

A storm of cheers now broke out among the people, drowning out the resounding metal of tubas and cymbals, until the lictors called for silence.

"Carnuntum! Greetings from your Caesar!" the emperor shouted over the crowd, and again this imperial greeting was answered by a volley of cheers from the people that rolled far and wide.

Four richly dressed municipal slaves now approached the emperor's triumphal chariot, carrying a baldachin-like litter, in order to lift the emperor onto the throne with it, according to Byzantine custom. A disdainful smile played around Valentinian's lips as he underwent this ceremony.

After the emperor and all the dignitaries had taken their seats and the other ceremonies had taken place, the imperial master of ceremonies stepped forward with his staff, bidding silence for the emperor's word.

Valentinian now spoke from the throne as follows:

"It is well known to you, my worthy Proconsul, to you, my consuls, prefects and councils of my province Pannonia as well as of the colony Carnuntum, the cause of my journey to you, to the threatened northern border of Rome.

As I strengthened the Rhine border, so I also want to secure the Danube border, to refortify what has been loosened in the course of the last years of misfortune, to reorganize what no longer corresponds to the present requirements and to adapt to them. Like my great role model, Caesar Marcus Aurelius, I myself, the first servant of the state, want to fulfill my duty and use my best advisors, my own eyes, my own ears, without therefore spurning your advice, my faithful, which is all the more valuable because you always have to think undisturbed in one direction, while I am busy and distracted in many ways. For this very reason, my consuls, I am also forced to work quickly and not to waste precious time with feasts and ceremonies. As the great Julius Caesar said: 'Came, saw, conquered', so will I also keep it. I came and now, gentlemen, I want to see, to be sure of future victory! Therefore show me my steed! My valiant Minister of War shall immediately march out all troops, for I want to test their efficiency under arms, their quick-wittedness and their abilities in building camps and bridges. When I have clarified this, we will discuss the next steps. On, gentlemen, on horseback, I have spoken!"

The highest dignitaries could hardly have been more frightened by their death sentence than by this imperial order; blanching, they could hardly contain themselves. Only in extreme despair did the Proconsul dare to rise and reply to the emperor as follows: "Sublime, invincible emperor! It ill behooves me to oppose you, O Valentinianus; but consider the hardships of the journey, consider that you owe it to the empire to spare yourself; therefore forgive your faithful counsel if he dares to ask you, O Caesar, to countermand your order and appoint the marching out of the legions for tomorrow. I must also reveal to thee that no provision is made to provide for thy high person worthily in the field; the kitchen is not yet packed on the pack animals, thy tents not ready for the journey, thy -"

The emperor did not let the proconsul finish; impatiently he stamped his foot and spoke unwillingly:

"What do I care for the kitchen, the tent, if it is for the good of Rome! Am I not a soldier like the next best legionary? Is the bread blacker for me, the

Baldachin: A canopy of state. It was part of a traditional ceremony for the servants to carry an Emperor to his throne on an ornate bed with four columns and sheets; the Baldachin canopy is the inspiration for the modern canopy bed.

earth harder than for this one, and if the Quades stood before the wall, would you also say: Tomorrow!? I thank you for your precaution; but I am a Roman first and an emperor second! Up, on horseback! Valet, gentlemen!"

With these words he rose from the throne and descended the broad steps, where the ready warhorse was already waiting for him. Free from the ground, without the help of the horse servant, he swung himself with an elastic leap on the back of the noble animal, which he immediately parried vigorously, so that it reared high, foaming and crunching into the curb, and stamped the pavement so that the sparks flew.

An astonished shout of admiration roared through the forum. (1)

The dignitaries stood as if paralyzed, almost petrified; the municipal slaves seemed frozen, still holding the despised palanquin in a kneeling position in front of the steps of the throne, which Valentinian had so ruthlessly spurned, mocking all laws of court ceremonial.

Confusion almost ensued. Still the stunned councilors remained dumbfounded, as if rooted to their seats, while a half-mocking, half-annoyed look of the emperor grazed the high assembly, whose situation became more and more uncomfortable.

Then a young maniple leader stepped out of the line of his cohort, ran back to the troop, where he quickly and resolutely controlled the general perplexity and arranged for horses to be brought before the dignitaries.

Meanwhile, the praetorians advanced in battle formation. The imperial lictors, led by the master of ceremonies, lined up for the procession, while the military tribunes conveyed the emperor's army orders to the individual troop bodies.

Although the emperor personally made and supervised all the orders, his hawk's eye by no means missed the saving act. When he noticed that the young warrior had returned to his place on the right wing of the maniple he was leading, without the centurion of the maniple considering this extraordinary incident worthy of attention, he ordered both the young warrior and the centurion to be brought before him.

First, the emperor addressed the centurion with stern words of rebuke: "Centurion! Do you call this discipline, when a man of my cohort is allowed to leave at will and without your knowledge? What can I expect from such untrained teams? You have been a centurion for a long time; give your helmet and your baculus immediately to this man whom I appoint a centurion in your place. Take thou his badges, and henceforth be maniple-leader instead of him!"

1. Stirrups and spurs were not invented until the 6th century, which is why the rider had to be helped into the saddle by the groom. It was considered a great feat of bravery, especially for older people, to jump into the saddle without help, fully equipped. In German legal antiquities, this feat even held the force of proof for acquired or still preserved male full strength. **Maniple**: A handful of soldiers in a Roman legion, a small tactical unit.

The centurion was destroyed; he wanted to stammer apologies, but the emperor did not let him speak, but made an indignant gesture. - The exchange of badges and dignities took place immediately. The man appointed centurion was still a young man, barely thirty years of age, from whose beardless face a pair of dark eyes gazed boldly out into the world, shadowed by deep black brows. The emperor's eye rested on him with obvious pleasure as he spoke the words: "You deserved punishment, but now you are a centurion! Beware of making the same mistakes but keep your swift determination. Your name?"

"Marcus Equitius, my Caesar!" the young man replied in a confident voice, fearlessly looking his supreme warlord in the commander's eye.

With a wave of his hand, Valentinian dismissed the two.

This incident offered the dignitaries a desirable opportunity to quickly get into their palanquins, which were to be followed by the horses; indeed, they were pleased that the emperor's bad mood was unexpectedly discharged in a different direction. Unfortunately, they were to be sorely disappointed. No sooner did Valentinian catch sight of this latest mischief than he thundered a gruff "Halt!" at the train, which had already begun to move.

"Are we in a comedy, and are you playing the dead on stretchers?!" he cried in a burst of wrath, "or are we going out for a show of arms and drill?! Mount your steeds and send the sedan chairs home! Obey!"

With that he contemptuously turned his back on them and, accompanied by his staff, rode off in the direction of the Castle.

With morose expressions the palanquins were abandoned and the horses mounted, whereupon each went to his body of troops to personally take their lead. - In an unusually short time the Forum civile was emptied and the mass of troops was on the march to the Castle. The Proconsul with his staff followed the troops in the utmost haste to be at the emperor's side there again.

The magnificent imperial tent was met with looks of disappointment. - What hopes his construction had awakened in so many breasts, what beautiful speeches remained unspoken, and how completely different, how hopeless, if not worse, his future seemed to so many of the high lords.

At the head of the cavalcade rode the proud Maximianus Mogetius Herenius, the Proconsul, with a gloomy brow. -

The repulsiveness of his appearance was today even more repulsive than usual. His viciously pale complexion had given way to the pallor of death, the thin bloodless lips twitched as if in fever spasms, and the eerily unsteady gaze of his gray-green eyes seemed to lurk like a wounded panther behind the hiding place of the blue-rimmed sunken sockets. At the side of the Proconsul rode his son Marcellianus. He was the worthy son of such a worthy father. In listless negligence the lazy youth sat on horseback.

For a long time they rode side by side in silence. Finally, after they had ridden a distance ahead of their entourage, the father broke the silence in a hoarse whisper. What he said was more like a soliloquy, and yet it was meant

for his son. Grief and fear, anger and helplessness took him captive; with rumbling words he remembered the ignominy he had experienced today. He, the descendant of Trojan heroes, he, the patrician, had to let himself be mocked, insulted by a common legionary, by the son of a ropemaker, whom the capricious Fortuna had thrown the Caesar's mantle around his shoulder instead of toppling him as a traitor from the Tarpeian rock! The legions, the mob cheered the plebeian, nay, the peregrine Emperor, and the descendants of those who once ruled the world from their cerulean chairs in the Senate of Rome, the offspring of Homeric heroes, lay humiliated in the dust before the insolent usurper. The tyrant had thrown a lion skin around himself for the occasion, so the angered one meant, and gratingly one must believe this disguise for true, because behind the lion mask a bear hides itself, and also such a one grew violent claws. But completely impassive, as if his father's speech had not meant anything to him, Marcellianus sat in the saddle, so the proconsul addressed his son directly.

He admonished him to give the appearance of respecting the bear's paws for real lion's paws; he admonished him to cunningly conceal his justified resentment and to flatter himself into the tyrant's favor by acting like a rude legionary. This, he said, was necessary to hunt down a position of influence and to hold his own.

A contemptuous smile played around the mouth of the son, who, forced to answer, replied with displeasure that his father today again liked to resort to boring admonitions in order to get rid of the crickets. Both did not want to understand each other for a long time. The son soon realized that he had a splendid opportunity to get rid of his father's stinginess and to get a larger number of sesterces for himself than would otherwise have been possible. The father, however, was anxious to know that his son was submissive even before he had joined the emperor's retinue. As the fear of the proconsul grew, so did the cynicism of his son, who thought that the wealth of the proconsul was enough to show the splendor of the house even without state office. In Rome, far away from this bear country, there would be no danger at all; there, at circus and arena games, would be the right way to show wealth, which would be equal to power. He would be too proud to beg for a quaestorship and to answer to a peregrine emperor for any accounts that did not add up. Enraged, Maximianus clenched his fist, but he had to control himself, because if he wavered, he needed his son to support him, which could only happen from some office of state, possibly in the army itself, with a chance of success. He therefore held out to his son the possibility of being proclaimed emperor by the legions and of earning the laurels of his house; he said with a forced smile that he considered him clever enough to let others pay for inaccurate calculations. But the unnerved young patrician said that although it would be infinitely sublime to steal the Caesar's mantle, his neck was far too dear to him

to put it in the noose voluntarily. The role of the heir to the throne, however, he dared to play at best with the necessary pomp. The rage and fear of the worthy father threatened to break his outer calm; but he was too well practiced in the school of dissimulation, he cared too much for the docility of his noble offspring, to let himself be defeated by passion. Only a piercing glance full of the deadliest hatred met Marcellianus, who, stubbornly pursuing his plans, seemed completely unmoved and quite unwilling to understand. The old man changed his attack. He tried to color his speech in a more cordial tone. Presenting himself as a benevolent father, he promised to double his son's fare if he would give him the promise to join the army as a Tribune this very day, and in such a way that the emperor would not notice his sudden entry. Marcellianus realized that his plan would succeed, and therefore he persisted even more stubbornly in his passive role; but less skilled in the art of dissimulation, he revealed by a joyful gleam in his dull eye that his father was victorious.

The latter, perceiving his advantage, said: "My son! Not only this shall prove my fatherly kindness to you, especially since the pay as Tribune increases your income, - it shall also be my concern to furnish you with a shining house. But I want to tell you even more. From today on, consider me more as your friend than as your father, just as I truly want to be considered a friend to you.

"That is a most clever idea!" said Marcellianus with a scornful laugh, while Maximianus rode beside him with divided feelings. "Very well, friend Maximianus, let your friendship be tried!"

"Try it, friend Marcellianus!" replied the Proconsul with a sardonic look. "I will not tell your father, O friend, of this, which you trust me with!"

"I praise that! Well then, in confidence. You know, my friend, that my father is the Proconsul of this province, the richest man, but also the biggest miser in it.

With difficulty the man addressed subdued his anger, but he replied apparently cheerfully: "That is the old man's way; I know him well and appreciate his reasons of thriftiness, which you, O friend, see differently. But proceed."

"Thou, friend Maximianus, mayst now tell his friend the Proconsul that I am willing to accede to his wishes as an obedient son, if he will pay me thirty thousand sesterces this very day, without prejudice to his other promises."

The Proconsul's horse reared at this moment, although it can hardly be assumed that the latter was so violently frightened by the demand of the new military tribune.

After the animal, and perhaps its rider, had calmed down again, the latter continued, "The test of friendship is practically chosen, but although a less vigorous one would have sufficed, I will pass it, friend Marcellianus. But, tell me, what is this sum to be used for?"

"You may, after all, reassure my father, friend Maximianus, that I will not

use it to buy the Senate of Rome for his election as emperor. I do not wish to plunge the dear father into any dangers."

"I call that nobly spoken, friend Marcellianus!" said the Proconsul in a biting tone. "But this does not answer my question."

"Hear then, friend Maximianus!" was the son's boisterous retort. "I will buy the blonde flute-player Lydia of the duchess Edone for it."

The proconsul's horse shied again.

"Friend Marcellianus! This girl is terribly costly! You have, by the way, no lack of such toys; voluptuous girls and richly curly-haired boys you have more than slaves. Would you be capable of falling in love with a flute-player!"

"Calm yourself, friend Maximianus! I know your honorableness too well, and therefore I will have no secret from you. I do not love her, but she is the only one who resisted me, the only one who dared not only to refuse me everything, but also to return my caresses with a blow to the face. When I wanted to chastise her for it, she hurled me down from the lectus, abused me and escaped. When I made a noise, Edone, the dowager, hurried over and searched the whole house for the naughty girl, but she seemed to have hidden herself, because when I had to leave the tavern to ride with my father to meet the emperor, she was nowhere to be found.

Maximianus replied somewhat mischievously: "I hope to see this girl with you; your delicate Lydia excites my curiosity not a little. I suppose you intend to practice Olympic wrestling with her?"

"By Hercules, no!" exclaimed Marcellianus, a faunish smile giving his face a bestial expression. "She shall be my first gift to offer my soldiers! It shall be a splendid feast. The wine must flow in torrents, and then, when Bacchic fury has brought the fellows out of their senses, I shall personally deliver the wicked one to the mob! For her decomposed corpse the hyenas and the wolves of the arena shall fight!"

A disgusting laugh closed this omission of the degenerate libertine. His father, however, thought it well to encourage him in this scheme, in order to be fully assured of his docility.

The cavalcade had gained the open field southward of the castle, where it found the troops already drawn up in battle array for the show of arms. There the Proconsul united his escort with the emperor's retinue and sent off his son with a well-conceived message to the legion prefect Marinius. The ruse succeeded. Marcellianus was incorporated into the army as a tribune without the emperor noticing.

In the peristylum of the Hibernum Castrium, the government palace of

Tribune: A military Tribune was a Roman position generally above a centurion (who would command 100 troops), but below a legate (who commanded roughly 5,000). The position was commonly used as a promotion or appointment for the sons' of important merchants or politicians.

Carnuntum, Domina Valeria Agrippina had gathered a large company of ladies today.

Contrary to the custom of many of his predecessors, Valentinian had seen fit to enter Carnuntum without the presence of his wife. In accordance with the seriousness of his coming, he wanted to push the military moment into the foreground, which would have been definitely harmed by the festivities that the reception of the empress would have required.

Domina Agrippina, the Proconsul's wife, however, was nothing less than edified by this. She envied the citizens' wives of the colony, who, uninfluenced by the ceremonial, could see their fill of the entry and the army show. She had tried to persuade her husband to let her participate in the reception of the emperor. She gave all the reasons. Carnuntum had to pay homage to the ruler of the world in his name, which had nothing to do with the fact that the empress stayed away. The women were also enthusiastic about his deeds and had the same right as the men to express their enthusiasm personally. The women were not the minor matter that their husband's made them out to be, and the emperor, who was married himself, did not regard women as such either. These and many other reasons, however, were not able to make the stubborn barbarian, as Domina Agrippina now tearfully called her husband, change his mind; he remained the victor and Domina Agrippina sulkily withdrew.

The victory was difficult. But he did not win it every day, as Carnuntum's evil tongues claimed.

At all times, poorly mistreated, misunderstood women's hearts have felt the need to reveal their tortured minds to sympathetic friends and to seek comfort in this revelation.

Domina Agrippina did not sulk long; she knew what she wanted.

In the midst of the peristyle in the Hibernum Castrum a magnificent tent of costly fabrics had been erected, which would have made a mockery of the pomp of the imperial tent. In it, the dining beds were set up in a horseshoe shape, covered with soft pillows, over which the priceless Attalian carpets were folded in lavish abundance: - an overabundance of imperial luxury. Agrippina liked to show off her wealth in addition to her almost unlimited power, with which she ruled everything, even the feared Proconsul.

Accordingly, the preciousness of the small round tripod tables in front of the dining beds, as well as the richness of the jeweled drinking vessels and fruit bowls, the amphorae and tankers of wrought precious metal, competed not only with the princely splendor of the tent alone. Harpists from the land of Cleopatra and from the sun-gilded shores of the Indus, flute players from the borders of Piraeus, and Attican singers were to be seen there in the exaggeratedly lavish adornment of their homeland, dressed in the heaviest oriental silks or transparent Koi pile garments. But where the native costume

did not require fabrics, as in the case of the two completely naked, ebony-black Nubians wielding the rich fans, these were replaced by gold bracelets and rings, by strings of pearls and coral. The two fans of multicolored parrot and ostrich feathers on the jewel-sparkling gold poles totalled a small fortune in themselves.

The mistress herself, Domina Agrippina, was carefully and sumptuously dressed according to the free Greek fashion and knew excellently how to extend the liberties of the same to those limits which showed her charms more than could be guessed. But she was also a proud beauty. She belonged to those rare women who understand the art of preserving the charms of the spring years until the highest age, and seem to be gifted by the gods with eternal youth. And since even then there were large wall mirrors, several of which adorned each of her chambers, she knew this very well.

A richly folded, deep garnet-red brocade cloak was thrown over her sumptuously adorned robe, which, fastened in two flashing clasps at the armpits, allowed its wearer to wrap herself completely in it. But it served more as a game for the woman resting in the cushions with distinguished carelessness, in that she threw the folds seemingly unintentionally, sometimes this way, sometimes another; the connoisseur's eye would have admired the great art with which this charming play of folds was done, which was based on long-trained practice.

In the twilight shadows of the ceremonial tent, ruffled by Indian incense, eight other of Carnunt's distinguished ladies lay beside Domina Agrippina. Numerous Greek lightly dressed slave girls hurried busily to and fro to serve refreshments to the princess's guests. The female Areopagus assembled here might well have sufficiently condemned the tyranny of the husbands and tired its tongues. All nine ladies were apparently reading in bored silence in the swelling cushions, or did they only respect the silence of Agrippina, the proconsul?

Now the beautiful lady of the house rose a little from her camp. With a quick jerk, she arranged the folds in the artificial swing in such a way that her nobly modeled leg up to half thigh gleamed dazzlingly through the delicate Cologne pile, and said in an angry tone: "We should, my dears, in all seriousness banish our grudges! Let us grant our men the happiness of being allowed to feast on the charms of the dirt-scented shoemaker's wife! Truly, I feel sorry for the emperor for having to see such a sight!"

"Only too true spoken, only too true, my royal friend, only too true!" replied one of the ladies; but the princess continued: "Did not the army passing in front of the terrace pay homage to us, as if I were Bellona herself!? To my good Maximianus I know thanks for it! How thoughtfully he saved us

Areopagus: A Greek governing council, often convened to judge murders and the arson of olive trees.

from having to inhale the dust, which, mixed with the foul odor that has always clung to the common people, would only have offended our noses. This pleasure, coupled with the exhilaration of being roasted brown by the sun's heat, we could really leave to our good marriage tyrants without envy. Only the emperor needs me!"

"Only too true, only too true!" the same lady from before fluted.

"My dearest, divine friend!" began another of the ladies, "allow me to add to what our friend Julia, the - quaestor, has just said. Here in your Olympos, where you reign as Hera, I feel happy to be able to spend those hours which our gracious emperor has actually given us! How sweetly your Heliconides sound music and song, how abundantly your twentyfold hills give us ambrosia and nectar, how pleasantly and coolly it rests here as in the realm of the Nereids, while otherwise we would have been annealed as in Häphestos' forge! That is why our dearest friend says so aptly, so unequaled spiritually to her: only too true!"

With these words the speaker sent a fleeting mocking glance at the Quaestor's wife, which glance was silently acknowledged by the latter with a piercingly venomous one. It was Livia, the wife of the legion prefect Marinius, a Domina above Julia in rank, who was allowed to take such liberties.

In order not to declare herself defeated, however, the Quaestor's wife whispered as wittily as possible: "Only too true, my royal friend, only too true!

The other ladies also found it refreshing to see Agrippina's rumbling brooding come to an end; life now came into the group.

Agrippina's speech sounded almost cheerful: "I told you, I am completely reconciled with our fate, and have even become quite cheerful. But tell me, dear friends, who is that young centurion of the third cohort in the fourteenth legion? I have never seen him. You know him well, my dear Livia; you are the wife of the most warlike legion prefect of Rome, as my husband, the Proconsul, always calls him! How should I be surprised if you did not know him!"

"Only too true, only too true, my gracious princess, only too true!" replied Julia, with a gleeful look, almost joyfully, for she thought the Proconsul had suspected a secret love affair between Livia and the young centurion.

But calmly, without giving Julia, whom she hated, a glance, Livia spoke: "My princely friend, you had seen right, but believe me, I was also surprised. It was at least as mysterious to me as it was to you, divine princess. This is

Quaestor: An elected position in the Roman empire, generally acting as supervisors for various projects in the economy or law. Interestingly, the Quaestor was elected based on their personality or achievements, but assigned tasks by random lot after the election.

The wives of Roman dignitaries were often referred to by their husband's titles. In this case, Legate, Prefect, or Proconsul can refer to the wives or the husbands, depending on context of the conversation.

certainly even more so because I saw the old bear Dignus riding as a centurion in front of the third cohort this morning during the departure of the legion. How it happened that another led the cohort in his place is as mysterious to me, Agrippina, as it is unknown, by all the gods!"

"By all the gods!" retorted Agrippina with a slight smile, mischievously threatening with her finger, "by all the gods! How unwise, my dear Livia! If only you had sworn by Zeus, then Eros would be out of the picture! But as it is, the latter must bear witness against thee, for I think thou caredst but too eagerly, just for the third cohort, to put that handsome centurion in the place of the old bear!"

"Only too true, only too true, my gracious princess, only too true!" gloated Juliet.

"It pleases thee, O Agrippina, my princely friend, to jest again, and though I admit that I am not displeased at this exchange, yet I must affirm that I have told the truth before."

"O you hypocrite!" said the Proconsul, laughing, "but punishment must be, and therefore, my little dove, jealousy shall afflict you, because you wished to conceal this from me. Now I want to see my handsome centurion and you yourself shall bring my message to him. Tell him: Agrippina, Maximianus' wife, wishes to hear from his mouth how he became a centurion, she wants to wish him happiness in this; she is also ready to promote this happiness most vigorously. I am eager to see how you, my dear, will pass this test of your friendship for me! What do you think of it, ladies?"

From the ranks of the ladies the echo of Agrippine's opinion giggled out with pleasure and gloating, for it should again be the custom that the table companions of a powerful man mean more in his presence than his echo.

Unperturbed by the taunts of the Round Table, the Prefect Livia spoke in dignified calm: "Your wish, exalted friend, is as decisive to me as Roman law. As soon as the new Centurion is allowed to leave his cohort, he will stand before you".

Silence had fallen in the circle of friends. Agrippina looked before her again, lost in dreams, while she resumed the artificial game of drapery. Did she just want to stay in practice, or was she already thinking about the young Centurion? The other ladies silently did the same. They smiled at each other's clumsiness in playing with the folds, but none of them dared to touch Livia. The wife of the legion prefect Marinius would be too dangerous an enemy. Therefore, they kept silent and waited for the next cue. Only Livia kept her calm equanimity. Even though she was a clever woman who conformed to conventional forms, she was the only one who surpassed all the others, even the Proconsul, in inner nobility of soul.

The latter seemed to wake up from her dreams. Hastily she downed a cup full of fruit juices chilled in ice, but pushed it aside unsatisfied. She beckoned to her favorite slave, calling out with passionate excitement, "You, Nera,

provide for Massic wine, well-mixed with sweet white honey and mulled water. But you girls from the land of the pyramids, let your strings ring out to a joyous chorus of rejoicing! Evoe!"

Already the strings of the instruments were whirring through the bewitching chiaroscuro under the tent's golden embroidered silk draperies.

The gold goblets circled, repeatedly filled with the hot sweet-flattering mixture of the fiery Massic. Sunk in blissful, taciturn silence of thought, the ladies lay dreaming in the swelling cushions. Rushing music, glowing wine, enthusiastic singing raised the awake dreamers above the earth, above the snow-glittered heights of Olympos, even above the stars. Confusing dream images appeared in front of those who had been taken away from reality, and that hot unconscious longing swelled the hearts, shuddering through them with unnameable sweet delight.

Nera, Agrippina's favorite slave and confidante, stood aside, keenly observing; she knew only too well that when the fiery Massic began to roll its floods of fire through the veins of her mistress, into her well-tried power the direction of the banquet was wont to pass. Therefore, she observed the mood of her mistress with fullest sensory acuity, in order to make her arrangements accordingly. She stood waiting, hidden behind the folds of the tent walls, as inconspicuous as if she were the last of the last. Nevertheless, her eyes and ears roamed both around the cushions of the dominas and around the corners of the slaves.

In a whispering voice, often with only a slight wave of the hand, she gave her orders, which were carried out almost more quickly and punctually than those of the mistress herself. No one would have guessed that the direction of this symposium had passed into the hands of the faithful Nera.

A few words whispered by Nera to the first trigonon striker, immediately ran around the circle of artists. The strings sounded softly whirring, an enthusiastic dithyrambos, carried by four bell-bright girls' voices, swayed on the intoxicating waves of sound and rose, like Jupiter's Aar, up to the gods.

"To be known and to know hereby! In the dawning early morning
Is from the resting bed's puddle, Eros just fled!
Boy still, always talkative and fearless, shedding tears,
Laughing with scorn, and buoyant, bow-armed and nimble.
Who his father, that one does not know, but neither the ether
Nor earth nor sea, wants the wayward for a son;
Enemy is the boy to all and hated! But now he sets -
Beware - nets already up, to see you who are guileless! -

Trigonon: Small, triangular Greek harp. **Dithyrambos**: A song dedicated to Dionysus, Greek god of wine. **Aar**: Eagle.

But, - he lies in wait! o look! - When he hovers by,
He thinks we do not see him?"

Cheerful shouts of Evoe devoured the last fading chords.

With a gracious smile the proconsul said to Nera: "Let yourself be praised for your song! I almost desire to know the poet, were it not for the fact that you provide it for me. Our Cancellarius will pay you a hundred sesterces for it tomorrow".

Kissing the hem of Agrippina's robe, the praised woman, kneeling, cried out: "Thank you, O mistress, for the favor. Yet the poet will not be entirely indifferent to Thee, O Lady. Allow your Nera to show him to you next".

Impatient at the intrusion, the proconsul waved her hand. Nera rose quickly and cast a barely perceptible mocking glance at her mistress and Livia.

She had overheard their conversation about the young centurion and immediately the plan had ripened in her to earn the merit of bringing the desired one to her mistress.

"Evoe!" cried the nine-voiced chorus. Nera fanned herself mischievously with satisfaction. She beckoned to the artists. To herself, however, she said, "The goddess-like! She thinks she is my mistress!" The chords roared anew, stormy, like a beckoning siren caught on a surging tide, this song danced over the wildly moving waves of sound:

"Only hurl hail and snow, even wrap the sky in night gray!
Lightning! yes, lower upon us the torrent of tangled clouds!
Kill us, O Zeus, or we'll never rest; no, let us live,
Let us love and rave on, even if you rage more fiercely!
Yet the god drives us, who himself, O Zeus, conquered you:
Wilt thou not, turned to gold, One day invade the eternal chamber?"

"Evoe! Nera! Were you not my slave, you would be worthy to be Agrippina's friend!" spoke the proconsul. "Let nine cups of stooped glass be filled with flaming nectar, one each to thee and the playing girls! Up! Let the strings buzz and bacchanalian rhythms resound! They call me Hera! So lift me up to Olympus!"

Again Nera beckoned. Gently the front silk draperies of the tent floated apart to allow the resting ladies another view.

New, livelier melodies in swirling rhythms, interwoven with the sounds of Akkadian flutes, roaring through the air.

Now a small but select group of graceful dancers leapt in a dainty round dance in front of the tent.

As they floated along, the graceful, supple figures, one thought one saw Psyche's playmates approaching. The only garment they wore was the chiton

of the most delicate Greek fabric, without a coverlet, whose incision reaching half thigh height allowed the daintiest little feet to be admired. On the upper part of the body, colorful iridescent butterfly wings swayed in artistic attachment, which were deceptively concealed by the abundant ornamentation of chains full of tinkling gold plates. Thus they floated along, like nymphs swaying in the waves of sound, accompanying the rhythm with their dancing bells, swaying in their luxuriant hips like the chorus of winged goddesses. In the artful play of their shining alabaster arms, flower-heavy rose threads waving above their little heads, the charmers floated in the sensuous round dance. But as the dainty bacchic vine lovingly entwines the marble image of Aphrodite, just so this whispering dithyrambic chorus caressed that enchanting image:

"Look, already Levkojen glow in the garden, also violets, daffodils,
Tulips, the ornament of the mountain, fragrant lilies bloom;
Cherished opens the rose, Cyprus' chosen blossom
Of loving joys the chalice; - flower of flowers, forsooth!
But, thou smil'st, O rose, in vain from your lovely leafy display:

More fair than any wreath, shines female charm!"

In gentle chords this hymn sounded out. The joyful shouts of the surprised ladies in the tent expressed joyful participation. Agrippina's loud evoe made it known to Nera how much she knew how to pay homage to the mistress's taste. But the hard poetic fragrance of the allure of female beauty in the cult of the Graces was not enough for the sensual Roman.

Nera understood the glowing pair of eyes of Agrippina. With a precious jug strewn with gemstones, Nera approached the ladies and dripped a few drops of a strongly rose-scented narcotic into each goblet. Agrippina downed the thus spiced glowing Massic in one draught, and, while a consuming fire flamed from her eyes, cried, "Evoe, by Bacchos and Aphrodite, whom we now wed in the goblet! Give a bacchic song, a bacchic dance, O, Nera!" "Evoe, bacchic song, bacchic dance!" echoed from the circle of bacchantes in the tent.

In frantic whirls the strings now whirred, the dancers spun like tops, and the singers intoned these Bacchic stanzas:

"When the sorrow-breaker Bacchos,
Child of Zeus, the sorrow turner,
Reigns as victor first in the heart,

Chiton: Greek style tunic**. Levkojen**: Known in English as Matthiola, a fragrant garden flower.

He, the giver of wine, teaches,
Floats us in the dance round.
O! - O, what pleasure in wine,
When moved by the cheerful intoxication,
All dance and sing and kiss.
Aphrodite, who invited us,
Floats before us in the dance round."

"Evoe! Evoe!" sounded from the tent, the goblets clinked, loud clapping and joyous cheering broke out, but Nera stood motionless.

Uninterruptedly the trigonons, the citharas and the flutes sounded on. The dancers flew and glided through the rosy evening air like colorful butterflies over calyxes. Slave girls hurried busily back and forth with the filled and emptied goblets. Other slave girls brought incense burners on precious tripods, from which voluptuous bluish ringlets rose and mystified the tent and its surroundings. Fresher and bolder, the strings now buzzed to the following intoxicating verses:

"Sweet it is, sweet, O by Pan the Arcadian, what we sing to thee, mistress,
Singing to the cithara now: Eros wants to hunt, the rogue -
Flee'? - But, how?! - His army of Eros flutters around us,

It never gives us rest; it refuses to draw breath!
Now Eros' power sets us on fire, and now the singing,
Bacchic floods now too! - All! - We flame with ardor!"

A small pause in the singing occurred, but the dance continued and changed to a faster tempo. Bacchanally the girls whirled along. Then from all sides winged erotes armed with bows and arrows rushed at the dancers and sought to hash them out in the dance. They were blooming beautiful youthful figures, whose wings, artificially fastened to the armpits, stirred with the powerful elastic movements as if for a bold upswing. Soon they had caught the girls in the dance, who whirled in unbridled corybant rage. The music raced away in a storming rhythm, and the singers joined in with the chorus:

Calyx: A very large vase of wine, usually placed at the center of a party. **Corybant**: Ecstatic dancers.

"Perhaps it rebukes one that Eros too willingly we follow,
Because we delayed our escape, also we too little resisted!
Let him not forget that Zeus and the king of the sea tide,
Yea, that Aides himself ardent love obeys!!!
If gods have done so, and it behooves us humans to follow their example
Why should we flee the rogue!?"

Now the climax was reached. Nera was no longer able to contain the onrushing storm of applause, which blazingly flooded all the barriers. The music was drowned out. From the tent only confused shouts were audible. Nera was distributing glowing Massicas in sparkling crystal goblets to the dancers, who now took over the bar services instead of the slaves.

Night had fallen

The moon's narrow crescent shone above the voluptuous, breathing tent, whose clouds of incense denied entrance to the gentle ray of chaste silver light, while multicolored gleams from lanterns covered with colorful silk fabrics seemed to flee out into the night, out from under the shielding bodices of the all-enveloping goddess, as if the moon felt shame at the scene he had just doused with glowing light.

Chapter Three

The Sunken Castle

Several days had passed since the emperor's entry into Carnuntum. After strenuous exercises, the troops had moved back to their camps and returned to their usual garrison duty. Although the emperor was still in the Hibernum Castrum of Carnuntum, the colony had already divested itself of its festive decorations and had again submitted to the rule of Mercury, who was apparently only willing to accommodate Mars hospitably for a short time.

At the Forum civile, the central point of the city traffic, a dense crowd gathered between the columns and stalls. Costumes of all countries and zones became visible and disappeared again in the tumult, whose restless hustle and bustle made itself known by a constant whirring and buzzing.

Here at the forum, busy Carnuntum piled up its riches, which consisted mainly of precious amber, the colony's main article of commerce. But also other goods gathered here or were spread like the sun's rays from here over the known world. Precious stones, gold and silver flowed from the mountains of Raetia, from the Orsinian Mountains (1) or the Asciburg Mountains (2), both of which were located in the land of the Quades and Marcomans. Animal skins, honey, flax and other products of agriculture, animal husbandry, hunting and fishing came from across the Danube, from Germania, to this Roman trading center, which was also the starting point of the highly important Amber Road to the Baltic Sea. Two roads ran from here to Rome. One via the Simitirich (3) and via Aquileia, the other via the Brennus. The waterway of Danubius connected Orient and Occident, and numerous other military and trade routes found a junction here. Caravans came and went, and Carnuntum's Forum civile absorbed these trains of goods or dispatched them

1. Mährisches Gebirge.
2. Riesengebirge.
3. Semmering.

like a vital heart the blood streams of the body through veins and arteries.

Numerous stalls with rich amber treasures lined up in formal alleys in the forum; others with copper and tin, iron and lead, or gold and silver ingots; still others, where man-made utensils or Etrurian ore manufactures from the dainty maiden's stand to the candelabra, from the small sundial to the precious silver-plated, finely polished wall mirror awaited the buyer. Iridescent silk fabrics, oriental gold embroidery, Italian gold and jewel jewelry, everything, everything could be found here, even human goods, slaves and slave girls.

"O, my gracious patron," the slave trader now addressed a young centurion who had just approached accompanied by some older fellow students. "Have these beautiful, excellent goods, splendid fellows, who have already heard of the great mercy of our divine Caesar, O my gracious patron! Choose only, Marcus Equitius, and think not of the sum! He who is in the favor of Valentinianus Augustus like you, who has become Magister Armorum so quickly, may also buy more than he can just pay! Don't worry, my gracious patron, don't worry! Doesn't this lad appear a splendid stableman!? To Cyno - show my strength to the gracious lord!" With these words, the merchant, with a thin, flexible crop, almost imperceptibly to onlookers, pulled a few well-meant strokes on the lazy rascal, so that he jumped up howling and almost seemed to dance. "There see, my favorable patron, this chest, these sinewy thighs and arms, and this bull neck. Have yet finer wares, high fine wares, spicy fine wares, only be pleased to enter, such I expose not to the gaze of the sun and curiosity, by the God of my fathers, no! Enter, my mighty Tribune, your eye will be dazzled by the splendor, it will think to look into paradise, as low as the hut! I swear to you by my father's beard, there is none among them who is not at least as beautiful as Venus herself! By the God of my fathers!"

"Cease your prating, old man," said Equitius, laughing. "He that is a right soldier can save money on slave girls. Procure me able lads for my familia, for service in the field. Slave girls you can save for veterans!" -

Among the other visitors of the forum, arm in arm in comfortable citizen dress, walked two old acquaintances; it was the veteran Petronius and his brother in Mithras, the Aedile Licinius. The good Petronius, who had sworn high and dear never again to slip into the armor, tenderly stroked his not small body protrusion, as if he wanted to make amends to him by such caresses for the cruel bruises that the cuirass had done to him. In other respects, too, he was in a very amusing mood. In highest enthusiasm he called: "What do you say, brother Licinius, to our splendid legionaries? Hel? Not everything is as it was when we wielded the baculus, they don't walk so tightly anymore - you know: left foot forward, - stretched, - toe and knee in one line, - One! - Two! - armpit back! - Ha! - What a splendor that was! - Yes the dear, beautiful, good old days!" The old centurion talked himself into the memory, which would have completely captured him, had not more recent impressions been more

powerful. He idolized the emperor. Licinius had been prevented by duty from hearing the speech which today Valentinian had made from the tribunal to the troops who had moved in. Petronius had now sought him out to inform him of the speech. He told how the emperor had held his own during the field exercises, how he had borne all the hardships and privations of the common man there, without claiming for his person those reliefs which his rank as well as his age would have allowed him. If this is sufficient to deify him already today, the fact that he pays the soldier the honor he deserves to such a high degree justifies this even more. Truly imperial Valentinianus understood to place the true merit above the right of birth. "And how divinely he knows how to heal smitten wounds!" Petronius exclaimed with pathos. "This morning-I was an eye-witness-before he blew the whistle and marched off the legions, he addressed the entire army asking if anyone had a request to make of him. Whoever wished to make such a request should come forward. Many came forward, among them Equitius. When the emperor saw him, he asked him in astonishment and half-jokingly, "Has fortune made me a glutton for punishment? What more do you want?" But the latter bent his knee and said, "Great Caesar! Let me plead for the unfortunate Dignus! Do not punish him so severely after forty-three years of service impeccably spent!" The emperor looked astonished, yet gracious. "You please me, you will never be a courtier," he said. "My word I may not revoke, but Dignus shall be made a veteran this very day with double centurions' pay." Now the fourteenth legion has two gods, Valentinian and Equitius!"

"And this Equitius is supposed to have become Magister armorum?" asked the astonished Licinius.

"As I told you. Divine! Imperial! Think of it, this rebel in the Caesar's cloak said scornfully, when the Proconsul replied to him that Marcellianus had already been appointed to that position: How mistaken you are! I appoint, and not you. If the proposed one is not suitable, then I propose the more suitable one myself, whom I then also confirm'. The Proconsul was fuming!"

Licinius had become thoughtful. He was accustomed to think that not only the goddess he served was blinded, but also those in whose name he served her. Valentinian, however, had no blindfold before his eyes like Justitia. But the Aedile was much too careless to be tormented by long brooding. The mischievousness was back in his neck. He laughed brightly and spoke with comical pathos: "Only a hundred years, O Zeus, grant Rome this emperor, and it will outlast your rotten world! But if Thou wilt hear my prayer, announce it beforehand, that I may yet at a good hour say valet to my goddess." Licinius blinked at his companion after this heartfelt outpouring, who, dissolved in delight and rapture, was unaware of what had moved the Aedile. As he noticed the amused nature of his friend, the teasing desire stirred in him again, wherefore he asked him: "Ad vocem, my brother in Mithras! Do you already know the result of the investigation of the precarious

case in which you are so unhappily involved? Not?"

The veteran stopped, startled; pallor covered his face. The silver amphora, long since emptied, now fell precariously on his conscience. He was powerless to speak a word.

The Aedile looked at him maliciously, then he continued seemingly indifferently: "No? You know, I mean that incident that happened when we drank from your so wonderful silver amphora at the Elephant the even more wonderful Massiker. You know, at that time -"

"By Mithras, go to the Hecate with your circumlocutions!" drove out the veteran, tormented by fear. "I know all that, say what I do not yet know!"

"Well," said the aedile with deliberate elongation of speech, "I didn't want to upset you, and I'd rather keep silent. I would have expected that you would not be indifferent to the amazing results of the further development of the case."

Now it became a bit sultry for our good Petronius. He lifted his cingulum a little and excitedly tossed the folds of his toga. Thereupon he began to pant, as his warhorse might have done when it had run out of breath. The silver amphora now appeared to him as a spectre. He realized that he had betrayed himself to the dreaded Aedile, that the latter must see in it a bribe, indeed that the terrible suspicion was close at hand that he had deliberately let the tramp escape. All this, which before had seemed to him so unworthy of attention, now, magnified beyond measure by his fear, appeared as proof of guilt before his frightened soul; he thought himself lost. Licinius, however, seemed not to notice all this had not a somewhat mischievous smile played around the corners of his mouth, no one would have doubted the purposelessness of his communications. To the urging of the latter he had answered, playing the astonished one: "Briefly, do you want me to explain it to you, briefly! And you know that I am Aedil, that I am a lawyer! You still have a guild of what is called logic? According to which everything develops according to the order and the three comes after the two, but not the four after the five. You do understand me, my best?!"

"Perfectly, my brother, but to the point!" said the annihilated one.

"Gently, my excellent friend and brother! Consider further that even logic lets fallacies creep in which even the most gifted aedile can hardly avoid. Here is an example! Tell me, what is this?" with that the Aedile pointed to the outlet pipe of the fountain at the forum.

The completely confused Petronius needed some time, as well as the tutoring of his mischievous friend, to recognize the object, whereupon he laboriously brought forth, "Well, it's a fountain, but -"

Misguided, my good man!"

Cingulum: Roman belt fitted with a panel of metal fittings.

"Am I out of my mind? I take this for a well!" wailed Petronius.

"Misguided, my sweet! It is an elephant," smilingly replied the Aedile. He then proved to his frightened victim that Pliny the Elder had already described the elephant animal and precisely listed its distinguishing marks. It is recognizable, so the famous wise man says, by the long trunk, with which it is able to spit water, as well as by the clumsy foot. These characteristics are correct, ergo this is an elephant and not at all a water pipe outlet well."

While Petronius stood there completely confused, Licinius' amusement had almost reached its peak. Only with difficulty did he preserve dignified seriousness.

"By all the gods of the Pantheon!" cried the anguished Petronius, "I do not understand you!"

"Believe it," replied the other. "After all, you are not a lawyer! But I will be clearer. Let's take your case. Suppose you suspect that the man in the blue coat is a scout. You send for the Aedile. Now comes Edone, who wants to avoid that he is caught in her tavern. She implores you not to make her unhappy. You have a soft heart. She recognizes her advantage and offers you - well, what for example? - Well, let's say a silver amphora full of Massica. - You think the exchange is not so bad and let the guy go. The Aedile finds the straw sheat, and you scream: Magic! Do you, sweetest of veterans, now understand what a fallacy is, do you grasp the great difficulty of the Aedile?"

"Quite tremendously perfectly," said (almost gnashing his teeth with fear), the tormented Petronius. "But I beseech thee by the mysterious Mithras, report, speak: what was the result of the investigation? Speak, but do not explain logic to me again!"

The Aedile stopped. He assumed a very mysterious official countenance, looked gravely and firmly into the eye of the favorite of three Caesars standing before him, trembling and changing color, and spoke pathetically: "By all the kind gods, by the king of the gods himself! the unheard-of, unexpected result was - nothing!"

"How, what sayest thou?" hastily asked Petronius, who had not caught Licinius' speech, only to say something.

"By Hermes! Nothing! The most absolute nothing, as you and all the philosophers of Greece together cannot think of a more absolute one!" the Aedile answered with a cheerful laugh, and then, turning to Petronius, who stood dumbfounded and speechless, he continued: "Yes, think of it, when my men had hung up the cauldron in the prison, as I had ordered them to do, and had closed it well, they put another guard outside the door, as if they had had to keep the most dangerous state criminal. When the troops had marched out and I had to stay behind as duty officer, I ordered myself down to the prison with a litterateur and the usual retinue in order to shorten the long wait. The heavy, iron-plated plank door screeched in the grate of the hinge, a municipal soldier shone ahead with his torch and we entered the dull vault. Well, as I

ordered, the cauldron hung like a traffic light in chains from the middle of the ceiling, but think my measureless amazement - it was as empty as today your so beautiful silver amphora may only ever be. Of course I immediately took a protocol and deposited it still in the same hour with all usual respect in the archive. May it rest there to be read by dust and worms; human eyes will probably hardly ever look into this scroll again!"

"Nothing, then, nothing! And that's why so many words, and that's why such unbelievably high logic, and that's why such nameless fear!" Petronius mumbled to himself, when his friend had finished, who, thinking of new pranks, silently walked beside him.

Then each of the friends felt a heavy hand on his armpit. Both of them, suspecting that a familiar friend was about to greet them, turned around at the same time and looked at the ghostly cloak-wearer with the one eye under his slouch hat. Erchantaug stood before them. With his peculiar dignity he spoke:

"Well, I will keep the truth. Nothing remained in the cauldron, nothing in the prison, nothing of Erchantaug at Edone, my most wise Aedil! But the weary wanderer will willingly grant you the meaning of the replying words, if you do not fail to ask. But never seek to make me go, for air is my nature; therefore learn, O truer of Roman law, to restrain wrath and to use time wisely!"

The Aedile had now regained his composure; proudly he straightened himself up and spoke with a face flaming with anger: "You insolent tramp, you know me well, but truly not well enough, otherwise you would not dare to address me here in the midst of the thickest crowd! Yes, I will ask you, but under lock and key!" At this he waved his golden staff, which he pulled out of the folds of his toga, to summon the armed men following him. In the meantime, however, the strange incident had not gone unnoticed. Numerous curious people crowded around the group, describing more and more circles, putting new rings around the old ones as in the growth of a tree, so that the armed men could break their way only with difficulty to reach their superior, the Aedil.

"Tame the wrath, bridle the tongue to calm speech, to searching question," replied Erchantaug with dispassionate marble calm. "Here hearken to thy wholesomely harmless word the world wanderer. Do not expect more! It resists, what about it, the counsel of the world's age. Therefore ask and inquire! The answer is granted by the weary wanderer."

"Well then, speak!" the Aedile replied angrily. One look had been enough for him to realize that he was powerless against the enigmatic at the moment. His armed retinue was scattered all over the forum. Although they approached their superior from all sides, the guard could not completely penetrate the ever-increasing scrum in which the Aedile was stacked with Erchantaug and the veteran. The Aedile saw that Erchantaug could not escape him, so he preferred

to stall Erchantaug until his team was at his side to grab the impudent one. Therefore he called out:

"Well then, speak, in the face of the citizens of Carnuntum! Answer! Thy name?"

With overwhelming dignity, the compelling influence of which even the Aedile could not escape, Erchantaug now spoke, rising high, his voice resounding far over the forum:

"With a name I never call myself! I'm called Wanderer, Helpful and Wish Granter, Hüller and Füller and Versatile, Breithut and Breitbart and Bösewirk, Deceiver and Truth Teller. Also Gluthaug and Glanzaug and Grauseblind, Brenner and Brüller and Bebelind, Wettrer and Waller and Wogenherr, Flutgeist and Journey's Guardian! I am also called Battle Rider, Battle Seat and Warrior's Joy, Helmet Bearer and Army's Shield, Foe to All Enemies! Sleipnir pulls my sleigh, Zeal in the Council, with Asmund Elk, Grimnir by Gerroth, but Eticho called me Gerlind! To the source of the Mimir I went as a stove and boiler, enrapturing the old giant, where I became Mittwolf's murderer, the legendary son. High and Even Higher they also call me. Since I went to the peoples, I am third, three times the Dys, I am father of victory: - Wuotan himself! - But I have by no means named them all; to you, however, I am called Erchantaug!"

Indescribably sublime, transfigured, Erchantaug stood before the wavering, paling Aedil, who struggled for composure. -It was probably only the fear of seeing his authority fade away if he lost in this battle of words that forced Licinius to utter threatening words, which, in mad excitement, he uttered in a shrill voice-so that they sounded more like an exclamation of terror than the official language of the Aedile: "This you dare to lie about! At the pillar of scourge - you newt - you will whistle differently! - Thy trade in Carnunt?"

"For thirteen times less than forty times ten rings of the sun my glorious people, the manly Germania, has kept the Wall Watch at the riverside! Useless to you were the brazenly armored boastful legions, useless the cowardly cunning, the faithless breach of word, useless even the yellow hungry dogs full of poison-slobbering magic, useless the most adverse deception! All this did nothing to help the rapacious Roma to make Germania's manfully defended drifts and greening districts on the other side of the damming river interest-bearing, all this did nothing to help the strangled she-wolf! But still on this side of the thundering Danube you govern and command! - Germania already grumbles with rolled-up fury at the terrible fetters that Roman greed has shamefully forged around her children south of the river! Villainous vices, shameless lechery, nefarious robbery of frenzied Rome rage and strangle in the thirsty land, where Roman law has rendered the hereditary lawless and heirless, propertyless and slavish! To redeem this land, to rouse the faithlessly afflicted Teutons on this side of the river to courageous action, to break their

bonds, to recapture what has been stolen from them, I now go, secretly helping, as Erchantaug through the Pannonian-Norse regions. Forge only chains, thou creeping, powerless, boorish race! Battle-bold Quades smash them to dust! Announce it only to the emperor, thou ruling guardian of the Roman law, announce it only to the bold! He dares to hinder my helpful work, he dares to hinder Herian's army fire, which Erchantaug, foreboding, has already gloriously begun to ignite. Your wild world has fallen under the curse of primeval times. Ignited at all four corners, it sinks smoking in smoldering embers, falling prey to terrible contractions, in order to give birth anew to a better world! This proclaim the emperor, you, be my Herald!"

The Aedile was defeated. The unheard-of boldness of the defenseless and yet again so irresistibly powerful had robbed Licinius of all his composure. He wrapped himself in his toga, ashamed and unable to speak back, and slipped away unnoticed under the protection of the powerful impression of what had happened. Likewise also Petronius.

The people, however, had recognized the powerful speaker. They retreated timidly before Wuotan, who had descended to earth again, paving an alley for the herald of future freedom, through which Erchantaug slowly and majestically departed.

In front of the flaming eye, at first the eyes lowered, then the first ones bowed, and finally they all formed a kneeling alley, through which he strode away. Erchantaug had won his daring game. -

The mighty man's powerful apparition, however, had not only the citizens of the Germanic tribe on their knees, but also the Romans present, as well as the soldiers of the Aedile, who were to capture Erchantaug.

The latter left the colonnades of the forum apparently impassive. Calmly and majestically he seemed to float above the crowd lying in the dust. For a long time, Erchantaug's tall figure remained visible as it strode out of the colonnades, crossed the Forum Civile, and over in the Via Aureliana disappeared from the eyes of those looking on. -

As long as the marvelous one stayed on the Forum, as long as he could still be glimpsed from it, so long it was spellbound in sepulchral silence. But now, whispering softly, this magic spell began to fade, a buzzing murmur began to buzz through the again stirring groups of people, until it swelled to a thunderous roar, whereupon finally the masses of people got excited and began to flow. As if awakened from a magic sleep, the most opposing opinions became loud, which now clashed most violently against each other. -

Erchantaug had indeed tried to strike the chords of national feeling; but in those distant days this feeling was still too undeveloped to inflame the people to a liberating act of uprising. The Teutons had not yet come to understand how their power and greatness lay dormant in the union of all their tribes into a single great nation; this realization was only the property of a few favored ones of their people. But they felt as a premonition a

demonically working urge for freedom. That is why Erchantaug's speech was so effective. When he remembered the foreign domination, when he emphasized that the slave who cultivates the soil for the Roman is actually the heir of this same soil, he awakened this sense of freedom in the hearts of the listening people. When he reminded them that the wealth, which the Roman flaunts, has only been cheated from the native, then the desire for freedom was joined by the desire for the wealth. The urge for freedom and the desire for a good life were the recruiters on which Erchantaug had to build in order to secure a following among the people and to ensure the prosperous progress of his great work.

The boundless poverty of the exhausted people had prepared the ground for Erchantaug's seed to sprout in it.

When in a state the actual basis of the national prosperity, the owning middle class, is impoverished and gradually disappears, but individual super-rich people rise from the total sum of the people, when the unhealthy wealth of these individuals is balanced by a plundered proletariat, then one of those crises occurs in the life of such a people, which leads to its regeneration, if it still has vitality, or destroys it completely, if it should have already squandered it.

Carnuntum, like the whole Roman colossus, was in this stage before the crisis.

Individual knights - the financial giants of the time - had come into horrendous fortunes. Wholesale trade was in their hands and petty trade was completely crushed. The state, which itself monopolized many branches of business, mines and factories, promoted the impoverishment of the people and later completed it by leasing the state institutions to those very knights. The leasing of mines and factories was followed by the leasing of other state revenues and finally ended with the leasing of entire provinces. Now, the systematic drain on the people grew to a great extent, and the state was rolling towards the abyss that was to swallow it up.

In Carnuntum, too, the people longed for the comfortable enjoyment of property, which they were no longer able to obtain despite all their diligence; they were defencelessly exposed to the exploitation of the knighthood.

In Carnuntum, too, Roman law applied, which was the right of the stronger against the weaker, the right of the propertied against the propertyless, in short, the law of a slave state.

So long as the people were leaderless, so long did they waver in their own sense of powerlessness, weak and harmless in the storm of misery. Recently it cheered Valentinian, who had risen from its midst - he was the son of a Pannonian ropemaker. One hoped for relief from him. His severity against himself, against the state dignitaries and officials, as well as his pronounced care for justice made the people hope for the unattainable. But he was also a representative of the law of the strongest, of Roman law. Popular enthusiasm

for the emperor had sobered and cooled. There were a few crybabies who gave vent to their displeasure, but the aediles did not pay much attention to them; they were convinced of their cowardice.

Today, however, things had suddenly changed, for the people sensed that they were no longer leaderless.

Excited groups pushed noisily and raved past each other, filling the forum and the wide square in front of it with their masses. Erchantaug's bold words were carried out among the people, praising or blaming, depending on their conviction or hope or fear.

"Wuotan himself did it, he announced to us salvation and recovery of our patrimony! There, look up to the proud palaces of the hated invaders, while I, the descendant of a Germanic king, am a traveling do-nothing!" It was Aistmuth who shouted this while grimly clenching his fists. But the good man did not think of his rusty fencing iron.

"Silence, you useless chatterbox!" a Roman shouted at him. "We still have enough room in the jail, and the scourging pillars have not yet become fewer for such rascals!"

"Strike him down, the despiser of gods, strike him down!" cried Aistmuth's friends, while the Roman, with a grim curse against the Aedile, sought his salvation in hasty flight. -

"Yes, Wuotan has come, I myself have spoken to him!" cried Aistmuth.

"You, Martinus have spoken to him -"

"Yes, I Martinus have spoken to him myself," replied with pride Aistmuth, whom a friend had addressed by his civic name. "Yes, and I tell you, we Teutons will soon be marching on Rome. He himself has entrusted it to me."

Now a growing number of curious people gathered around Martinus Aistomodius, who had been completely ignored for so long; for to hear one with whom a god had spoken was worth the effort of listening. Soon Aistmuth had also told what he knew, but his listeners wanted to know more, which is why Aistmuth also told more, and so it came about that his adventure in the forest was soon, infinitely expanded, to be talked about throughout Carnunt.

The tumult at the forum continued. "If it starts," shouted one of the crowd, "it can be all right with us. Our houses are unburnable, our treasures unlootable, but the table will then be laid for us in the palaces, and there will be no lack of wine." And so it went. Such talk and shouting increased to the point of eeriness.

"Outrageous, titanically outrageous!" cried a man of hasty, morbidly excited nature. He wore a knight's ring on his finger. A handsome retinue of slaves distinguished him from others, and a slave with a writing tablet under his arm and a stylus between his fingers indicated that the master might have concluded many a sale or purchase in today's market. "Outrageous, titanically outrageous! What do you say, friend Philander? Our Aedil - the wretch! He

must be deposed! - At once! - And the blue-coated tongue-thruster, that agitator of the people, must be publicly flogged to death, impaled, beheaded, burned, crucified, flayed!"

"Certainly, certainly, friend Caustus," replied the addressed one anxiously. He was also a knight and had a similar retinue as the other. "This very day I speak with the Proconsul. As many accomplices as possible must be executed as well; increased by a few hundred slaves in case of need. We can initiate a small collection among ourselves for this purpose. I will give two of my good-for-nothings for this purpose. The people must be intimidated. These guys, doused with bad luck, shall light up the forum for one night. That will be a lesson."

"It needs one!" cried another knight. "I fear mightily. Just look at these ragged fellows, how they are leering at us - it's come to the extreme!

This and similar conversations buzzed through the groups influenced by various interests at the forum. Clever speculators used the consternation to secretly acquire whole lots of ivory, amber, tortoise shell or other precious goods at fabulously low prices. Many a timid merchant lost enormous sums of money with a light heart, for he already felt happy to exchange for gold, which was easier to bring to safety, instead of the space-wasting goods. May the new owner see to it that he rescued them from the flames of the riot! Already, the fear threatened to degenerate into general horror, magnifying the suddenly visible danger to an unbelievable degree, when the blare of tubas could be heard coming down from the castle. Soon the stamping of horse hooves and the peculiarly tactful sound of the stride of several cohorts was heard.

All fear was immediately dispelled. As if blown away by the wind, the eerie ragged figures had disappeared as inexplicably quickly as they had appeared before. The traffic on the forum revived again, the prices again became firmer, and finally one laughed at each other because of the fear. They even accused those who had quickly bought the goods in the confusion of having deliberately caused these events in order to enrich themselves.

Without any further disturbance, business went on again, the knights gradually disappeared, the stalls were closed and the crowd dispersed. Only the tactful step of quadrupled patrols of legionaries, who today guarded the Forum instead of the municipal soldiers, resounded in the colonnades of the Forum, on the streets and in the alleys of Carnunt.

The ghost was scared away, but not banished---------

After Erchantaug had followed the Via Aureliana for a good distance and perceived that no one dared to follow him, he quickly turned left into a side alley and quickened his steps. In order to deceive any pursuers, he had moved away from the Forum in a different direction than he would have had to take in order to reach the destination of his wanderings, the Strada ad Tabernas. Avoiding all the busy streets, he finally reached, by a long detour, a narrow,

winding side alley that joined the Strada ad Tabernas next to the Tavern of the Elephant. Enclosure walls and wooden fences bordered this alley, as well as the windowless side fronts of two houses of the Strada ad Tabernas. Into one of the many corners of this alley Erchantaug now stepped. After making sure that he was not overheard, he quickly threw off his blue cloak, his floppy hat and the silver curls of his beard and hair, rolled up his cloak with astonishing agility so that it resembled a gray bundle, which he now took on his back like a backpack. From the belt he pulled the pointed marten cap, on which he put the long eagle feather, which was stored in his bag next to his short hunting sword. On his staff, he quickly attached the spear's head, which he also carried in the sack. In an unbelievably short time he had completed this transformation, and now strode out into the Strada ad Tabernas, warbling a merry little song. He had become again the young huntsman who had spoken with Aistmuth in the meadow before Carnuntum.

Thus he entered the Triclinium Edonens of the Schenkin in a cheerful mood.

He was not mistaken. The one he hoped to find here, he also found, taking his regular place on the lectus; only to Erchantaug's regret Licinius the Aedile was still missing.

"Heartfelt greetings and willing service beforehand!" the entrant called to Petronius, who was resting in the cushions.

Pleasantly touched by the cheerful manner of the one who had entered, Petronius also gave a friendly greeting. With the impartiality of a natural boy, Erchantaug immediately took his place at the dining table, from which he had disappeared a few days ago with Gisalhild in such a mysterious way.

The gift-girl Sophrona had brought the welcome cup like the rosary to the new guest and asked him for his desire.

"Girl, you ask too much!" the latter had replied with a laugh.

"What do I, a traveling nobleman of the tribe of the Rügen, know about it?" And turning to Petronius he continued: "You advise me, venerable inhabitant of the imperial city. Your wisdom shall be my staff, far from the hall of my father."

Petronius, flattered, gave him the requested advice; the girl departed to wait on the veteran's protégé.

"What seekest thou in Carnunt, Rügish nobleman?" asked Petronius after a benevolent drink. The heavy gold snakes on the supposed stranger's upper arms put the favorite of three Caesars in a friendly mood.

"To Rome I will go, Carnuntian guest. To hunt fortune, I sailed from the gulf of the Rügian royal castle" was Erchantaug's rejoinder.

"So alone and without a retinue?"

"Why not? With the royal carriage I drank a farewell drink. As a descendant, I must seek happiness elsewhere. Do you know, O my venerable

host, where happiness may be found?"

Petronius felt aroused by the open, guileless nature of the hunter - therefore he answered: "My son! You ask me where to hunt for fortune, and yet you yourself are a child of fortune? Know then that Fortuna, the capricious one, can never be hunted down! On a glassy blue ball she steers through the air, and woe to the daredevil who follows the ghostly glow; he crashes in the abyss! But she floats above the gaping depths like the down of the mayflower in the zephyr. But she herself will put the gifts in the lap of those who do not seek them. You, stranger, seem to stand in her favor, without it being known to you."

"Me?" asked Erchantaug with well feigned astonishment. "Me? who travels the world by land, looking for Mrs. Sälde?"

"Mrs. Sälde?"

With difficulty suppressing a smile, Erchantaug replied, "You must be mocking me. You don't want to know the good Mrs. Sälde!? She gives us happiness and she is the one I am looking for!"

"Well, well. Happiness!" remarked Petronius, making a philosophical deep drink. "Then surely your wife Sälde is the same whom I called Fortuna and warned you against?"

"That may hardly be," was the hunter's reply, drinking carefully and always watching the veteran unnoticed. "Never did I hear her cruelly scolded, never give her the name you mention. My good wife Sälde cannot be your Fortuna!"

"And why not?" replied Petronius lecturingly. "By the victorious Mithras! Thy goddess, does she then give the gifts equally to all? or does she not rather distribute fortune according to whim, mark well, according to whim and not according to merit! And do not the innocently shortened ones also say, Mrs. Sälde is cruel? That you call her the kind one, proves enough that she has gifted you without your knowing about it. Even your wealth in gold calls you a liar!"

"So you think, O wise counselor, that happiness and gold are the same? Yes, if this were true, you would be right! But I feel that both are different; this is like the wing of the Aar, which strives towards the sun, and that is the lead weight at the loom of fate, which forces the rising threads willfully down to earth, in order to tie them up by the colorful impact of the shooting thread! If you call the gold luck, then the rulers of fate never dignified you to look at the deity forebodingly!"

With an inquiring glance Erchantaug's eye roved over Petronius' countenance, which now became peculiarly animated, while he replied:

"Bold art thou, my lad, by the never-vincible Mithras! You speak boldly words, without suspecting that the one who lies before you, the one whom you see with your own eyes, has probably already experienced more than the gods have seen. With these my bodily eyes I have twice already seen a god, also spoken him; still my heart trembles in violent beating!"

A satisfied smile slid across Erchantaug's sunny face now he had succeeded in showing the target to the wavering conversation without suspicion.

He strove not to let this guiding star go out. As if in disbelief, he shook his head and said: "Believe me, worthy adviser, I am a scion of an ancient lineage of gods. My father, the king, sacrificed for his people himself, I helped him with the sacrifice and learned the magic runes, also I sacrificed myself, but never yet did the gods dignify my eye with such mercy, which you just mentioned praisingly! Are your gods then more powerful, more merciful than mine, nevertheless you speak of them as the cruel ones?"

"Difficult is the answer to thy un-difficult question;" was Petronius' emphatic retort. He raised the cup to a memory-stimulating drink, and having gravely set it down, began to narrate expansively. He said that all the gods of all peoples were basically one and the same person, who was only multiform in appearance, but unchangeable in essence, just as Fortuna and Frau Sälde could only be distinguished by outward appearances. How many different Jupiter, Apollo and other gods there were, which seemed to be different even under completely identical names and yet were the same. This was recognized and the pantheon was built. Therefore it could not be decided so easily whether these or those gods are the more powerful ones. - A second memorial drink followed the first. Now the veteran described with self-confident pride how it had been his privilege to face a god twice already, at the same time reporting in epic breadth what had happened or not happened during these events. Petronius concluded this report after a repeated drink of remembrance with the words: "Yes, young guest, believe me! I and my mighty friend, the Aedile, stood spellbound, motionless. To speak to a god in the flesh is more than manless! I do not fear your father and all his people, and if he were king instead of the Rugen, he would be the chief king of all the Teutons. I do not fear the Roman emperor, who is the most powerful ruler of nations, as far as Phoebus drives his horses. But towards the cloak-wearing god of your people my tongue was paralyzed. I saw him, I heard him, I know that he lives! May scoffers and despisers of gods deny the existence of the celestials, now I know that they lie!"

Highly satisfied, Erchantaug listened. Equally satisfied, the veteran emptied a freshly filled cup.

With a look of believing amazement and shy reverence for the favorite of three Caesars, so obviously favored by the gods, Erchantaug asked how the Aedile, this pillar of Roman law, thought, or whether he also belonged to the despisers of the gods. But before the talkative veteran could successfully retort this new attack on his memory, a drink of enthusiasm was an unavoidable necessity. The small amphora of wine, however, was emptied.

With skill Erchantaug seized this opportunity to tell the guileless veteran

how his father, King Rugimund, had informed him that the most precious wine on the tables of the Roman emperors was Cäcuber. He asked him to allow him to celebrate his entry into Carnunt, according to native custom, by serving it to his paternal host, the chosen one of the immortals. The paternal advisor accepted this favorable offer, but he remarked that King Rugimund was greatly mistaken if he held Cäcuber, which by the way was excellent, in such high esteem. This honor did not belong to him. There was only one sun, as there was only one wine, and this nectar was the Massiker.

Soon a huge amphora full of the noble Massiker sparkled in front of the two.

Now Petronius made a respectful gesture to refresh his memory; then he began to tell: "The Aedil has a sour office, for which no one may envy him. As a man he thinks like me and everybody, but as an aedile he must not see the god. He must follow his trail, he must man all the gates and exits of the city with quadruple posts and have strong patrols marching through the streets. Every suspect is seized, every conceivable trace is pursued. He is required to find the culprit for the cross or the stake and as many accomplices as possible for the sake of making a warning example."

The veteran's memory needed rewetting. Erchantaug also waved his cup and drank to Petronius, whereupon he said, "Poor Aedile, how I lament his fate. Not the emperor can do that."

"Well said, young friend!" said Petronius into his goblet, so that it sounded as if the voice came from the bowels of the earth.

Erchantaug soon realized that the brave veteran had little prospect of victoriously passing the spacious amphora in the battle with the Massian, since he was already showing alarming symptoms of absentmindedness. Erchantaug could therefore proceed more directly to his goal without arousing in Petronius the suspicion that more than impartial curiosity lay behind his questions. Yes, he even had to hurry, because the favorite of three Caesars was on the way to stop talking completely for a while. Therefore he asked: "Tell me then, you chosen one of the Olympians, what is the meaning of Equitius, the Magister Armorum?

The veteran smiled meaningfully over the rim of the cup at his young guest. He was one of those who did not take it easy in drinking. Massiker was good, and he lay before the amphora like a field captain before a besieged city. Through an examining glance into the widening cavity of the amphora, he noted with wistfulness the ebb of the wine tide. "Do you have more of it in the cellar?" he had asked the girl, thoughtfully emptying Erchantaug's cup. He let it happen quietly. A new amphora was brought. When Petronius toasted Erchantaug again, a seven-colored wet glimmer sparkled like a rainbow around his eyes, and he said, "Who are you?" But then he recollected himself and said: "Yes, 'tis a thing of one's own - The Equitius -yes. You know, brother - we go across the Danube - build castles and roads - up to the

Suevicum Mare. - To you, of course, they say - hm - Amber Road - ha, ha, ha - clumsy Teutons - ha, ha, ha."

Erchantaug knew what he wanted to know. Again the veteran nudged Erchantaug. "By the victorious Mithras, just no more silver amphora!" he said emphatically. Erchantaug did not understand him.

"Well, a golden one then," Erchantaug lightly gave in reply.

"No, not a silver one," Petronius was about to say, but his eye glazed over, the goblet wavered in his raised right hand, and then, spilling its contents, rolled into the pillows. The veteran still raised his weeping head, still his lips moved tonelessly, then his eyes closed and his head sank beside the goblet into the wine-damp cushions.

Erchantaug now threw several gold pieces to the present tavern maid for the food, donating the surplus to her as a guest gift. Delighted with the princely gift, the girl left. No sooner had she left the triclinium than Erchantaug closed the window with the agility of a cat and drew the curtain. Deep darkness now lay over the chamber.

Now Erchantaug quickly removed the pillows and blankets from the place of the lectus on which he had been sitting, pulled a stylus from his belt and thrust it between the butt joints of the brickwork from which the dining bed was built. A whole row of bricks descended like a trapdoor, opening up a dark shaft that led to the depths. Into this shaft he pushed his hunting spear, and the rolled-up coat, whereupon he himself dived down into the opening. After entering the shaft up to armpit level, he nimbly arranged the pillows and blankets of the dining bed above his head, whereupon he sank completely into the depths. Now he closed the drop board again, to which the bricks were artificially attached. The dining bed in the triclinium Edonens, however, was again put together as unrecognizable as when he left it with Gisalhild in the same way.

Petronius, when he awoke later and was escorted home by his faithful Patroclus, learned only that the stranger had paid the bill profusely and then left the house. To ask how, or to care, occurred to no one.

Erchantaug had reached level ground after entering the chimney-like shaft for several man-lengths. He had entered the earthen stables, (1) the sunken castle.

The Suevicum Mare is Latin for the Baltic Sea, the northern sea separating Europe from Scandinavia.

1. These "earth stables/erdstalls "* to which the folk tales of the "sunken castles" are connected in numerous cases, are still found today partly completely, partly only in their remains preserved in the many hundreds in Lower Austria, Bavaria and Hungary on both sides of the Danube. They were dug into the loess (clay) layer and were built by a guild of craftsmen because of their systematic layout, with the same

A cavernous chamber was what had housed him. In the uncertain glow of a small ship-like oil lamp flickering in a niche, the grayish-yellow veined mud walls seemed eerily illuminated by the eerily dancing shadow of the intruder. Erchantaug picked up his bundle and the hunting spear, lifted the lamp from the alcove, and strode into a deep dark passageway. He followed the narrow passage for a long time until a yawning shaft suddenly seemed to lead vertically to the depths, which shaft opening, however, he skipped. This was a trap for uninvited intruders, for the shaft widened conically towards the bottom to form a moderately large chamber from which the descender would have been unable to find a way out.

At this trap, the passage suddenly turned at a right angle, but after only a few steps it resumed its original direction. Now, once again, a vertical shaft led upward, but of only a small height. It led into a circular chamber, in the middle of its floor. A heavy trap door had been in front of it. After he had carefully locked it again, Erchantaug nimbly changed again into the old cloak-wearer. Now he took the lamp and examined the round chamber with a keen eye. It was a room of the most peculiar shape. The dull oil light illuminated a circular chamber that seemed to cover a pointed dome. All irregularities were carefully smoothed, as if by an artist's hand; the curvature was impeccable, offering no support to the eye. All proportions and spaces seemed blurred. To the one who was not completely familiar here, the sense must have been confused in

dimensions everywhere. One would not be wrong to assume this guild as the origin of today's "dike diggers" and "well masters". The characteristic of these strange earth buildings are their chambers and corridors. The entrances lead, usually in an oblique direction, often vertically into the earth. In the latter case, there are so-called "stone niches" for the entrant, carved into one wall of the chimney-like entrance galleries at certain distances arranged according to uniform measurements. They served to insert the toes when entering and leaving and represented the stairs. Such staircases can be found repeatedly in the interior of such earthen structures, where they are pushed forward one above the other in a tier-like manner or stretched through the interior of the earth in a step-like manner due to terrain considerations. Passages and chambers are mostly pointed arched, vault-like closed upward, more rarely in the round arch. The pointed arch gave more support to the soft material than the round arch. However, the corridors do not always open into the chambers at the same level as the floor, rather the floor of the chambers is usually lower than the floor of the corridor, which therefore usually opens onto a seat ledge or a seat niche, which was then used as a step. In most of the chambers, the walls are rounded with seating ledges cut out of the grown floor, or there are seating niches. The former occur only in chambers, the latter in those, as well as hanging. In addition to these "seating niches", there are also "equipment niches", which are larger, then "light niches" for adjusting the lamps, instead of which console-like projections occur here and there; finally, so-called "touch niches". These, which are regularly distributed everywhere at certain points, served for orientation in the dark without light. In addition, "speaking niches" opening to the outside are often perceptible, which were undoubtedly dedicated to oracle purposes. Such "earth stables" are mentioned by Xenophon in his "Anabasis", Strabon and other ancients. The labyrinth was nothing more than such an earth stable. Formerly

this chamber and all sense of orientation must have dwindled. Three corridor openings and at equal distances from each other, distinguished by nothing, led from this hall in three directions apart. All of them were tightly and securely closed by strong planked doors.

Erchantaug had made sure that no uninitiated eye had seen this chamber. He now opened one of the three doors, passed through another long corridor, until this, interrupted by several plank doors, finally opened into a spacious hall.

The hall, which widened here, had been hollowed out in the form of a rectangle by the dike digger in the clay layer, whereby he had cut out a row of seats from the grown ground along the four walls. The room had a pointed arch at the top. Many weapons for protection and protection, like precious jewels lay on the clay benches. The lord of the sunken castle entered. Two mighty white wolfhounds jumped towards him with a loud bark of welcome, and flattered him with their eyes aglow. A huge white horse joined the white dogs, neighing, to greet the returnee, just as a pair of cawing black ravens fluttered across the stallion's bow and sat on Erchantaug's armpits.

"Greetings, fellow crypt-keepers!" called the returnee, caressing the animals. To the joyfully growling wolves he threw roast scraps, which he had taken from the drinking room in the Elephant. "There you have, Gierlich and Gehrlich, my dogs, and you, Gedank and Gedenk, my pair of ravens."

The dogs rushed over, and the ravens shot over their heads, each grabbing his share.

"Thou too, my good steed, shalt not be forgotten." With that, he pulled a slice of white bread from his pocket, dipped it into an adjacent wine jug, and thrust it down the steed's throat, breathing gently into its bloated armor and

they had served as dwellings and as places of worship. But since every religious cult is conservative by nature, the cult of Wuotan retained the earthen stables for a long time, even when the people had long since learned to build dwellings above ground. Yes, the first churches of the Christian god were demonstrably underground for this reason. See catacombs. Even in modern times, some of these artificial caves remained serviceable to superstition; the "village witch" lived in some of them, and may still be working there now and then. Also the so-called Geislerkirche is to be looked for here.

The following quotation may prove that the German legend is well able to remember the dwelling of the earth stables:

"They mounted their horses and rode to Sigfrid's (the Greek's, not Fafni's) dwelling, which was a house dug under the earth, and out of it two women came to meet them, one was Sigfrid's wife and the other his daughter..... There the house was decorated with beautiful carpets (wallpaper-like hangings, is meant here) and Dietleib was well entertained to the night.

...Such is to be read in the Wilkinasage. "Old German and Old Norse heroic sagas. Translated by Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen. Third edition. Breslau, Jos. Max u. Chomp. 1872.1. volume. 97. chapter. Pages 262 and 263.

nuzzling its nobly curved neck. Sleipnir lowered his head to Erchantaug's chest as he nuzzled him on the crest.

"Soon we will go on, good Sleipnir, soon - soon".

Thinking, he paced up and down the hall; then he stopped.

"How lonely it is there!" He wanted to say, but a deep sigh swallowed this half-loud thought.

He thought of the eighteen rune sticks he had picked up at the healing place in Stronegg. He thought of the will of the rulers of fate made known to him through these fate-less ones. A heavy sigh escaped his chest again, while his right hand shadowed his eye and his left hand pressed against his throbbing heart.

Gedank, the raven, flew to his right armpit and plucked him by the beard. - He remained motionless.

It is never good when one who is to remain unarmed holds a lovely female image in his arms and feels her heartbeat breast to breast. Gisalhild was still in the sunken castle. She did not suspect that he could be a man of flesh and blood, and more to her than a cold-hearted god. That was why the wide halls had become so lonely for him.

Greedy, one of the wolves, nudged him with his muzzle. He did not notice.

How beautiful the future would be at their side if he didn't have to be a god! Lonely, unprotected, that's what the will of the deity demands. He sighed deeply.

The wolves licked his hands; he did not feel it. Schleifner rubbed his mane head against the wild beating that enclosed Erchantaug's chest. He barely noticed that, too.

"One day shall I make them the only great people! In me shall culminate Wuotan's world-conquering power, to crush the Roman army worm, and I am too weak to conquer myself! You shall be me, and I am hardly myself. O Gisalhild, Gisalhild! - And the eighteenth rune! Horror seizes me. - Is she the end? The crown? - The crown, the crown without her!?"

A new painful sigh escaped from him. His head sank to his chest again, his eyes glistening with moisture.

Gedank, the raven, flew from his armpit to Gedenk the Raven and looked long and meaningfully into the eyes of his life companion. It seemed as if he wanted to whisper to her secretly: "You, Gedenk! Gedank thinks things are not right with the king and lord!" Of course, the Raven did not say this to Raven, for he had not been taught these words. He therefore contented himself with an eloquent nod of his head. Understanding intimately the raven looked at her raven husband and called: "Raunenden advice, raunenden advice, father of the wall." Gedank, the raven, nodded dignified applause, then gravitationally postured himself, for he too was a scholar, and croaked with confidence,

"Wuotan calls, Allfather, Wuotan calls."

Now Erchantaug raised his head. He lifted the still tear-damp eye upward, as if he wanted to see the sun through the earth layer arching above him. This look announced that he defeated himself.

"Yes, you, God of hosts above in Valhalla, it is you who call, and it is I who follow! It is You who approach, You of mountain-shaking storm rage, You who shake the forests with flaming lightning, It is You who approach, when the air becomes fire and the earth thunders hollowly from the army stampede; It is You who calls! Here I feel it shaking in my heart. You yourself lift me from my breast to secure heights, the gentle moon rises before my eye after the raging storm, and mildly shining your silver stars write the interpretation of the last rune on the clouded arc of the sky!"----------

Erchantaug had put on a golden shining tunic and pressed a shimmering golden helmet with a mighty flying eagle as a cimier on his gray hair. A precious sword of splendid forging shone on his left, while a mighty throwing spear with gold-glazed tip sparkled in his right. The blue cloak billowed from his shoulder and folded over his buckled shield and coiled army horn.

Questioningly, his animal retinue gazed at him. "Gierlich and Gehrlich, Gedank and Gedenk, I need you; you Schleifner still wait for a ride." With that, he handed his white horse another piece of bread dipped in wine as a farewell. But sadly Schleifner bowed his head and let the refreshing gift fall to the ground unhappy.

Comfortingly, the armored man caressed the noble animal and then quickly strode out of the hall. The animal, however, looked after its "grave comrades" with bowed head, until dogs and ravens came out of sight.

Erchantaug, surrounded by the ravens and followed by the dogs, walked through a long corridor, which, like the hall and its immediate surroundings, was illuminated by numerous lamps scattered in the light niches.

Silently he walked along until he reached a strangely shaped throne chair at the end of the corridor.

The same rose over three steps as a mighty chair of rich carving in ebony and ivory with ornamentation in amber, gold and tortoise shell. Behind it, a tent-like wall covering rose up to the ceiling, formed by a red silk fabric richly interwoven with gold, on which fantastic animal shapes in bright colors seemed to crawl through tangled, twining tendrils. In front, heavy blue silk curtains embroidered with silver stars fluttered down, held apart by heavy silver cords so as not to cover the throne. On this throne chair Erchantaug now noiselessly took a seat. Unprompted, the two dogs crouched at his feet on the second step, while the ravens settled on one of Erchantaug's armpits.

After Erchantaug had arranged his position, the folding of his cloak and the position of his shield and weapons, he pressed a hidden spring, whereupon the throne together with the draperies began to rotate around its own axis and

only stood still when it had reached the opposite position.

In another part of the far-branched, sunken vent, the three healers (1) sat with Gisalhild in the hall of the council. Although these three thought themselves to be knowledgeable, they were not aware of that part of the earth stable in which Erchantaug was ruling; indeed, they hardly suspected that beside the halls inhabited by them there stretched other, larger ones. Even Erchantaug's presence was hidden from them.

The hall of the council was laid out in a rectangle and two corridors opened into it, or rather, it was intersected by a corridor that separated it into two unequal parts. The smaller half had clay benches like Erchantaug's hall along the three walls, while the three wall surfaces of the larger half of the hall lacked these seating strips. On the other hand, a beautiful seating niche was broken into each of them. The clay benches as well as the niches were covered with blue cushions. In each of these three niches sat a youthful spinner, deep opposite on the cushions of the clay bench sat Gisalhild's lovely girl figure.

The three spinning maidens were peculiarly dressed. Richly varied flower-white dragging robes without sleeves enveloped two of the lovely ones, for whom rich gold belts stretched the soft folds over the hips. The unbraided golden blond hair crowned a royal tiara, from which gossamer veils flowed, while rich gold snakes adorned neck and arms.

But the third of the maidens was dressed in deepest black, even her veil wore the color of the night. Her girdle as well as her serpents did not shine like

1. Three Healers, three Sisters, three Virgins, three Nones, three Norns, three Founders, three Doers of Good, three Maidens, Moja and others are the most widespread ghostly female figures of the German belief in miracles, namely the white woman (Bertha, the spinner = Perahta, the shining one = Frouwa, Wuotan's wife), which has expanded to the triad. The personal names selected here occur in the legend, even in the church service over whole South Germany widespread. From the Brenner up to Cologne, from Lake Constance to the Danube. They are the legendary echo of the female god triad: Frouwa, Siebia, Helia, which of the male ones: Wuotan, Donar, Locki. (Hail, three kings; three devils; horse's foot, buck's shape, chain, etc.) As in these two are white (Wuotan = Caspar, Donar = Melchior) and the third (Locki = Balthasar) is black, so also in the female triad Hel, the goddess of death, the daughter of Locki. The legend always lists the third sister as cursed, as evil, as blind, as black, as rejected, while the first two are thought to be white, blessed, good. The third one is the norn, which breaks the thread of life spun on and on by the other two (compare Parzen). Their almost corporeal appearance in the legend, lets presuppose with certainty that they - as representatives, priestesses of the female Gods - existed factually, and as such inhabited the earth stables, which served historically provable up to the recent time by the mandrakes and village witches. In the legends and myths there are exactly three generic names of those ghostly virgins, namely Hechsen, Hexegissen, Hegissen, then Truden, and finally Valen. - These three correspond again to the triad Wuotan, Donar, Locki and Frouwa, Siebia, Hel. A fourth genus: the Mandrakes, Alrunes, Aliorunas (Jornandes, Tacitus and others) emerge individually, namely as fortune-telling sacrificial priestesses, and always as old women, while the other three are called virgins. Analogous to this, there was also a male priesthood. The resulting system of this quite peculiar hierarchy shall be made vivid in our novel.

the joyous gold in the air color of the sun, for they were forged of dull gray silver, as if they had adorned dead men for a thousand sun rings.

All three spinners shone in the most dazzling beauty and competed in it with Gisalhild, who sat modestly before them, but without giving up the dignity to which birth entitled them, like the protection of a god.

For a long time they sat in silence opposite each other. The three of them were stretching, Gisalhild was unoccupied. Her arms rested carelessly in her lap, and her dreaming eye was lost in the unseen distance.

Then Norne, dressed in black, let the spindle slide into her lap, and turning to the other two spinners, she began: "The great nine-day week is already over, sisters, and we still await Herian, whom the daring maiden has announced to us. Tough doubts force me, Vilebetta, the Vala and the keeper of runic riddles, to ask your opinion, Ainbetta and sacred Hechsa, the wishing maiden of Wuotan, and you Warbetta, the Truda of the thunderer Donar. Vilebetta, the wala, has spoken."

"Yet ever art thou, and ever wilt thou remain, the disfavored Wala, O sister Vilebetta!" retorted the Hechsa reproachfully.

Gisalhild's eye quickened. The speech had awakened her from her reverie, but she answered nothing. She waited for the question, as was proper in the healing place of the deity, before it is consecrated.

Ainbetta continued: "Don't you know, malicious Wala, that when the maiden appeared so mysteriously to us, we secretly threw lots to her in the deepest depths of the sacred well? We marveled at the divine lots of the unadventurous daughter of Gambin. She is free from guilt. But I also pronounce this sentence: Never shall the princely maiden leave the hidden halls of Hutberg, before Wuotan himself honors her. Not a hair shall be bent, the skin not scratched!"

"You have thus fulfilled Walfather's wish," said Warbetta, the Truda, to Ainbetta. Then she continued: "If it is all right with you, tell the maiden once again how she found the hall, where any other human child would have died of despairing fear, while heroically, like few women, she braved the horror of triple night, steadfast and cheerful, trusting in the word of the wish granter! More of the tests still she passed boldly and uncomplainingly, proving herself worthy of the news of the future. So many miracles shake and intimidate even me, used to miracles, and therefore I never dare to doubt."

"You have spoken, Hechsa and Truda!" replied the Vala. "You have spoken, but you have never converted me! Yet I will be silent!"

"So tell us again the miracle tale, Walfather's desired child!" said Ainbetta, the Hechsa, and with a wave of her hand asked Gisalhild to report her arrival in the hall, like origin and rescue.

Gisalhild, modest but not at all intimidated or afraid, showing with dignity that she knew in whose protection she was, began her narration: "Sublime, healing sisters! Gisalhild, Gambin's daughter of the mighty man-king and king

of the Quades, noble and un-noble, she swears eternal oaths to you that she will uphold the truth when she speaks. I was not legally captured in war, but stolen by despondent men who came walking down the road from the Baltic Sea, with bulbous bales full of precious amber, to the Forum Carnuntum. Not suspecting anything bad, I watched the crowd in front of the moat of the castle, as they passed by with pack animals, donkeys and horses. Then an old goat-bearded man, his name is Mardochay, showed me a delicious necklace of the purest egg-yellow amber and promised to give it to me if I told the guard that my father had already approved the passage of the group. I did it, lured by the magnificent jewelry, knowing that father always allows the passage! Later I found out that I was shamefully deceived! Not only did the rascally cunning man cheat my father out of the duty for the train, which of course I did not understand at the time, but after we had the guards at our backs, he attacked me, bound and gagged me, threw a cloth around me and forced me by cruel blows to carry a heavy sack. Thus we reached the shore of the Marahabia. Ships were waiting there, and never again would I see my father's castle! The old scoundrel took me to the Forum. There he took my clothes and gave me others of transparent material, which covered me as little as if they had not been there. I still knew little of what Mordecai wanted. Then came an unpleasant woman, Edone the dowager, to whom I was sold as a slave! In her house I was to play the flute for the amusement of the guests. There came a wild sissy Marcellianus, the son of the Proconsul. He wanted to force me with violence. The anger moved me. I chastised the insolent coward with these fists and fled to the other slave girls. But they jeered at me and said that what he demanded was never shameful, that I was a slave and had no will. But what I had done, my back would atone for, Edone understood very well how to give the scourge! I thought I would rather die, but I still hoped for mercy and did my duty. To a guest I offered my welcome. But when I looked up and saw his figure, I recognized Wuotan at first sight! He refuses me to call him so and demands to give him the name Erchantaug. I flee to him, he lifts me on his lap and swings the cloak around me - I hear noise and raving, also Edonen's voice I recognize shuddering, but its threatening turns into fearful pleading - I do not know myself to grasp any more - the senses faded away - I lost consciousness.

When I awoke, I was in a hall like this. Erchantaug stood before me in shining tunic, the two greyhounds, the ravens, and the steed were at his side. Seriously and solemnly he spoke the words: "Gisalhild, proclaim to the knowing heal-advising truthful women of runic wisdom, Ainbetta of Hechsa, Warbetta of Truda and Vilebetta of Wala, whom you will soon see, that on the ninth day after today they shall turn to the hall of the council, there awaiting Herian, who demands his pledge, then redeems you girls. Not a hair of my head shall be missing, Princess! They shall take care of you, as Frouwa once took care of Nanna! Keep my word and announce it to the battle-hardened

virgins, what Wuotan's will and truth saying!"

Bright light dazzled me until then, which suddenly went out when these words faded away; I found myself in darkness, with threefold night surrounding my eyes. Groping, I stepped away, and at last remained seated at the edge of the chamber. How long this lasted, I cannot tell, but you know it yourself, how you found me. You wise, knowing women say the ninth day has come! So long have I been without the friendly gaze of the cheerful sun. I cannot know if your words are true, but I must believe them. So you women go to the hall of the council, as Wuotan demands, his word be kept!"

"You foolish girl," replied Vilebetta the Wala, "are we not staying here in the hall dedicated to the whispering council? Do you think we need advice?" She could not go on with her speech, for astonishment had taken away her speech and movement, as it had all those present. Two black ravens flew out of the corridor on the right and sat down in front of the healers. One said: "Wuotan calls, Wuotan calls, heed the call!", whereupon the other interjected, "Raunenden Rat, Raunenden Rat, Walter der Wal! (Rune Council, Rune Council, Allfather!)

Thereupon they rose and flew back again the way they had come, whereby their "Wuotan ruft, wahrt den Ruf; Raunender Rat; Walter der Wal" (Wuotan calls, heed the call; Rune Council; Allfather) continued to resound clearly from the dark corridor, becoming more and more muffled and finally fading away.

Gisalhild had jumped up, she wanted to escape nimbly into the dark corridor, but Ainbetta beat her to it; seizing her by the hand and holding her back, she spoke in a reproving tone: "Wait! To greet the ruling Wuotan befits only us, those dedicated to his service; you follow the trail of our feet!"

With that they rose and strode into the dark passage where the ravens had disappeared. Ahead the Hechsa, then the Truda, while Gisalhild was the last to follow the Wala.

A glaring light at the end of the corridor, made them suspect the place where they should see the god.

Now they walked in silence and shuddering, until Hechsa, blinded by the bright light, put her hand protectively in front of her aching eyes. Only after she had accustomed them to this sea of light, she, like her companions, was able to enter the shining hall.

The room that presented itself to those who entered was a regular rectangle, arching to a point. It had only one entrance at the narrow front, while on the left long side there was a long bench, opposite to which there was a large niche. All around, the walls were covered with blue wallpaper with silver stars embroidered in a bright glow. In each of the four corners stood a rich chandelier, artistically cast in ore and studded with twelve burning candles, as well as two twelve-branched chandeliers hanging from the ceiling.

In the niche, behind the blue silk curtains with silver stars raised by heavy silver cords and tassels, rose an imposing throne seat on a three-tiered base.

On this rested in helmet and tunic, the wolves at his feet, the ravens at his head, the noble mighty Wuotan with flowing silver head and beard hair.

Staggering step with trembling knees the Norns entered the hall, but Gisalhild, timid and thankful heart, rushed forward, and at the feet of the king of the gods, she cried with bright enthusiasm: "Now I behold Herian's helmet and broad armor gleaming, the buckled battle-shield and Balmung, the sun-sword, also Walvater's throwing spear, his wolves, the ravens, now thou art not Erchantaug, but Wuotan, the Walvater himself! Grant, O divine ancestor, whom Gisalhild calls Eticho, grant the granddaughter greeting and helping, counseling word of comfort!"

Now Ainbetta had recovered; trembling and pale she rushed toward Gisalhild: "What, madwoman, have you done!? We shall all pay for this with our lives! Who dares to set their tongue on a bold chariot to speak first to the god?"

But he beckoned Gisalhild friendly, pulled her to him and kissed her forehead. Then he lifted her back to him on his lap and spread the cloak over her delicate head, which now rests against his chest.

Now he raised his head. Turning to the kneeling priestesses, he began to chant the following rune staves, saying:

I fordrew my pledge from Hutberg's halls
And loose it against Heervater's mercy;
Keep the word of the rune-truster,
Sing and say these staves of the strong:
From the south a threatening dragon rushes,
That joten rages (1) like the worm of the world,
He gleams with scales from shields of brass,
He stares witheringly in spikes of steel!
Already he beats the waves of the thundering Danube,
Envious of corpses and lusting for lands,
Fire-breathing, like Fenrir's companions,
Greedily approaching, thronging before all,
To cool his fires in northern fairy floods
As if Loge were riding on the shining trunk
Of the raging whale, to see the world. -
But I will strangle him, the wretched lindworm,
Suffering still to his sorrow he experiences
When with burning fire of the scorching sun
The envious night beast Wuotan conquers!
Therefore, ye who know, counsel salvation
As above on earth, as under the earth;
Give judging counsel, not sad consolation
To the grief-stricken bold fighters,

Lift up the hope, restrain the harm
Of the suffering paralyzed and desolate oppressed
Keeps the heroes in faithful defiance,
Till victorious the monster to Hel I send!
So I redeem my pledge from the halls of the council of salvation
And sang you Siegvater's shield song.
Sing and say the staves of the strong,
Keep Walfather's wish-word.

The three Norns were still kneeling before the enthroned Wuotan with their hands stretched out over their heads in prayer. Suddenly he had disappeared before their eyes. But there, where his pews rose, an empty niche showed itself behind the star-embroidered blue fold of the silk curtain.

Still half stunned, the three left the hall. - Hardly had the last of the Norns lifted her foot from the threshold, when a booming iron curtain was lowered in front of the hall and closed it again inaccessibly.

Startled, they fled from the hallway.

Soon they had reached the hall of the council and sank exhausted into the cushions of their seat niches.

1. Joten (pronounced I-oten) = giants according to German mythology. Naming, therefore iotenwütig synonymous with riesenmähig angry. The Joten are the personifications of the rough forces of nature, whose raging had to appear to the nature people as blindly angry raging of higher forces. One thinks of spring floods, storm tosses, ice breaks etc. By the way from Joten later became: Jütten, finally Juden. Hence the confusions in place names, legends, even in heraldry. Judenburg, -au, -berg and others should be called Jotenburg and others. These places lie also all in the mountains. The heraldic Judenhütlein is nothing but the Joten (giant) hat. The Nuremberg patrician family of the Juden or Jüdden is also such a confusion.

Chapter Four
Marcus Equitius

The day after the events at the Forum civile of Carnuntum, Marcus Equitius, the new Magister armorum, strode out of one of the barracks that formed the "Via sagularis sinistra" of the Castle. He had donned the shining armor, the badges of honor befitting his new rank, to pay his inaugural visits to the society to which he now belonged. - Ceremonial required that he be accompanied on these visits by his familia, his retinue of slaves.

He too had five slaves, but his familia was composed differently from that of the veteran Petronius. Nowhere did the saying "like master, like servant" apply more than in the slave state of Rome. The boastful Petronius had his crier Patroclus, who had to shout to all who would or would not listen that his master was the favorite of three deified emperors; Equitius was different. Instead of the crier, the first of his slaves was a nomenclator, that is a slave who had to know everything, know everyone, be privy to all the relations and intrigues of the society. His task was to draw the attention of his master to all the people of the society he met, so that he could greet them according to their rank. - He had to know to which sacrificial communities, drinking symposia or other corporations the person concerned belonged, to which noble Domina he was devoted in love or what other love affairs he cultivated; at the same time he had to be secretive like the Lares of the house, mischievous like Hermes and faithful like Castor to Pollux. His place was to the left of his master.

They had reached the place where the Via Principalis crossed the street through which they had stepped. Here, on the right, the view of the "Altum Forum", the main square of the castle, opened up; on the left, the gate tower

Magister Armorum: Leader of the armed forces. **Crenellated**: The gaps in the top wall of a castle, allowing archers to step out and shoot, and reload under cover. **Ashlar**: Squared, flat stones reserved for finer castles, as opposed to field stone, which was unworked stone simply stacked.

of the Porta Principalis Sinistra, with its crenellated ashlar battlements, pointed out. A scrawny old man, in a daintily folded state toga, was just tripping through the gate, foppishly putting his thin legs one in front of the other as if in dance step.

"This is one of the Proconsul's parasites," said the nomenclator Sixtus, "his jester and minion; therefore, O lord, you must greet him kindly."

"I? - I am, after all, Magister armorum, and he is a merrymaker and parasite!" interjected Equitius unwillingly.

"True enough, sir. But he is with the superior Proconsul! Consider, he is at least not a slave!"

"But my rank -"

"Only your nomenclator, not your mentor, am I, O lord!" retorted Sixtus, falling silent.

"You counsel that -" said Equitius hesitatingly.

"Consider, sir, that he is a freedman! On the other hand, what demands Nera, the slave!" replied Sixtus modestly.

"Remember that I am Magister armorum!"

"No, sir, still less that you should remain so!"

The Magister armorum stopped, like one who is startled by something. Thereupon he saluted the Proconsul's parasite:

"Greet me with threefold salutations, O Phanius, Thou friend of the Exalted, Thou, my mighty Protector! I wish thee salvation and all the treasures of Thesauros!"

Phanius stopped. With a dignified patronizing expression he looked at the strong figure of the young Magister armorum for a long time. Then his countenance brightened, his pointed nose seemed to approach his pointed chin even more than the toothless mouth already allowed, while the small piercing cat's eyes became almost invisible in the wrinkled grin of his face. Chuckling, he said, "By the Dioscuri, call me friend! We want to be like them. By my princely friend Maximianus shall my friendship be worthy to thee. Come, let us go together."

With that he looped his arm in the young soldier's. They strode on, Phanius casting satisfied glances in all directions; for now, after all, he could be seen striding arm in arm with the Emperor's favorite toward the Hibernum Castrum. He endeavored to appear exceedingly dignified, and to accustom his prancing little legs to the marching step of the soldier. Equitius noticed this and walked more slowly.

"Yea, by Bromius and kind Venus!" began Phanius, "we two shall resemble a mixture of firn wine and sweet cider!"

Thesauros: A place for treasures. **Dioscuri**: Castor and Pollux, sons of Zeus who were so inseperable they were called by one name. **Hibernum Castrum**: Fort for housing soldiers. **Bromius**: Another name for Dionysus. **Firn**: Well-aged

"Gratefully I will recognize the gods' gift of your benevolence, my fatherly friend," Equitius had guilelessly retorted; but chuckling, Phanius gave in reply, and again the tip of his nose seemed to approach the tip of his chin in friendship, "Hi, hi, hi! How fun! I, the favorite of all the women at Agrippina's court, your fatherly friend! Hi, hi, hi! Know, friend, I am still frightfully young!" And placing his fleshless left hand, the color of parchment, more heavily on the tanned arm of the Centurion, he whispered confidentially in his ear, "Yes, seriously, young I am, my brother, my heart still glows like the top of Vesuvius under the blanket of snow! they all appreciate it - hi, hi, hi -yes, my young friend, old rusty swords are often better than those which the armorer has just finished, as my friend the Legion Prefect is wont to say."

They had reached the porticus of the Hibernum Castrum. Double sentinels had been raised there today. The imperial praetorians and the bodyguard of the Proconsul were divided into them.

The guards offered a military salute, which the Centurion returned. But Phanius also thanked them very graciously, as if the salute had been meant for him.

They strode through the vestibule into the atrium, where Equitius handed over the shield and staff to his slaves, who joined the rest in a corner of the hall; only Sixtus accompanied his master into the tablinium. There Equitius, like Phanius, took from a waiting precious vessel a few grains of incense, which, bowing their heads, they sprinkled on the sacrificial flame before the silver lares of the house.

Here in the tablinium, the Proconsul sat on a throne-like bisellium to receive his clients.

With his right hand pressed to his chest, those who entered bowed deeply before the mighty one. Phanius felt bound to add to this prescribed salutation by kissing with a genuflection the purple hem of the proconsul's toga, and saying in addition the words, "May my princely host and powerful patron not remain unknown to the feelings of reverent gratitude and most faithful subservience with which I remember at all minutes his welfare and honor, and the sublime deign to commemorate in grace his admirer!"

The Proconsul, looking rather sullen, returned the greeting more kindly than might have been expected: "Maximianus salutes me, O Phanius! How did I miss you yesterday, smoothing my brow, sweetening my wine?"

In a weepy tone the parasite said: "O, my highly wealthy master! Bacchus and Venus were held from me! Groaning, I lay on my bed of pain at the consequences of your excellent symposium and longed for the hour when the sun of your face would shine on me again."

Now the Proconsul turned to the young Magister armorum. The latter

Bisellium: A special seated area for the most important guests at a concert.

repeated the silent ceremonial salute of before, which prevented him from noticing the piercingly venomous glance Maximianus shot at him.

Equitius, too, spoke a wide-ranging salutation, as was required by custom. The Proconsul returned it with a smooth tongue, and one might have supposed from his words that the emperor's favorite had found in him his warmest protector. After he had instructed him that he had been summoned to the council by imperial order, which would soon convene, he dismissed the two with a gracious wave of his hand. Other clients, among whom was Licinius, the Aedile, came before the ruler's chair.

Equitius and Phanius strode through the extensive colonnades of the atrium.

Just then, a cute slave girl bounced toward the two. "Tell me, handsome centurion," she addressed Equitius with a smile, "tell me, are you the new centurion of the third cohort in the fourteenth legion?"

"Hi, hi, hi, my mischievous Sabinchen, will I finally get the kiss I promised? Hi, hi, hi - I won't wait long, you tomboy; mark, I'll take it, I'll steal it!"

"Are you the new Centurion? Not?! Be patient until I find him," Sabina replied, and was about to hurry toward Equitius, but the kindly old gentleman turned her back. He now looked so kind and amiable that for a brief moment his chin really seemed to kiss the tip of his nose fervently.

"I will not let you escape now, my little dove," he said, urgently, "until I have at last certain assurances."

"Very well, be content, my Phanius," said the girl with a mischievous smile, "only let me order my commission. Tonight after dark all shall be granted thee, if thou be fine! Will you promise to be patient until then?"

"Oh, how I'd love to, my sweet, sweet Sabinchen," replied the friendly old gentleman, trembling with joy, and as the girl hurried past, he quickly tried to steal a little kiss from her. It happened by chance that the kindly old gentleman, due to a quick turn of Sabina, came into somewhat rough contact with one of the marble columns, so that, emitting an involuntary cry of pain, he rubbed his nose violently and threatened the mischievously laughing girl with a comical gesture.

Equitius had now approached Sabina and told her that he would gladly await her message.

"If thou art the one sought, Nera, the chief house-slave of my princely mistress, sends me word that, when thy office in the council is done, thou mayest be led to her at once."

"As you, lovely child, so wisely and excellently dispose of your message," said Equitius, taking Sabina tenderly by the chin, "tell, fair little one, your excellent Nera: Marcus Equitius, the Magister armorum, will appear before her as soon as his service permits; tell her he is already burning with eagerness to

hear her wishes. And if you want me to give her this kiss, tell her I will send it to her," and with that he nimbly embraced the girl and gave her a hearty, true soldierly kiss. Laughing, Sabinchen said, "I'll be careful not to give it to the grumpy Nera; choose another messenger for that kind of dispatch!" Equitius immediately embraced her anew, and robbing her of a kiss he said, "Well then, I'll take it back, and bring it to her myself!" to which he laughed heartily. The girl also escaped with a merry laugh.

"Hi, hi, hi, didn't I tell you in advance?" remarked the friendly Phanius, still stroking his nose, "if I hadn't been promised the sweetest rendezvous by the lovely Sabinchen this evening, jealousy would have to turn me yellow already. hi, hi, hi! What enviable guys you soldiers are, you come, you are seen, you conquer! That little bit of shiny metal that surrounds your chest, what magic is in it! I will ask my mighty patron to bestow upon me the dignity of a military title!"

"Do not do so, my excellent friend!" said Equitius, with a touch of mischievousness, "do not do so, think how much more glorious the victory of the daintiest folded toga of Carnuntum over this brazen garment, when you shall rest cozy with the fair child in her lily arms!"

The friendly Phanius rubbed his hands with a chuckle and pranced beside the Centurion, soon greeting this one and that one familiarly, saying and receiving a few binding words. Equitius also had the opportunity to exchange many a conversation, to return many a handshake, to make new acquaintances. The emperor's favorite, as he was soon called, easily opened up all circles that were otherwise more difficult to open up to people of a much higher rank.

Meanwhile, the Aedile stood before the Proconsul; they discussed the puzzling incident of yesterday.

"And you, Aedile, are of the opinion that the one in the blue coat is not a swindler or an impostor?"

"My high lord! You know my prudence, you know it, how restless I am in the service of Roman law, as far as it concerns people! What goes beyond that goes beyond even my best skill! Remember the Casus Cetronius Cupitianus, my high lord; remember many other difficult judicial cases, never failed my arm, never failed my speech, only to the gods am I powerless!"

"So report to me what precautions you, Aedil Licinius, have ordered to substantiate the truth of your claim."

"My high patron and lord!" said the latter. "Well do you know how the mysterious one, who pretends to be Wuotan, but repeatedly called himself Erchantaug here in the city, is incomprehensible. He comes, one does not know where from, he goes, one does not know where to, he appears, he disappears! He paralyzes the people, the soldiers. Instead of grasping him, they stare at the weaponless one, petrified, and come to themselves only when he melts away into the air. No one else, O Lord, notice, none of my henchmen and secret scouts ever saw him enter a house, ever come out of one. No gate

guard has ever noticed him, and yet reports from the city and from the flat countryside report that he appears soon here, soon there, at distances which clearly show that it cannot be a humanly tangible being! There he has been seen on an eight-footed steed racing along as a hunter, there as a cattle herder with the blue cloak, here as a terribly brilliantly equipped god of battle, once alone, then again with three or twelve, probably also in the company of three ghostly virgins, who are also seen without him. The people call these, O Lord, healers, and strange legends go through the land about all of them! One of them, I spoke to him myself and interrogated him sharply, claimed not only to have seen and spoken to him, but also to have obtained wealth from him in a miraculous way. The man is noteworthy for the very reason that he is the descendant of one of those Germanic kings who, because of their friendship with Rome, were driven from their peoples and found protection among the merchants of Rome. His name is Septimius Aistomodius Martinus; he is a pauper, but a Roman citizen, although he stubbornly retains his barbarian costume, especially the untrimmed head and beard, the sign of his royal descent. The tombstone of his ancestor stands outside in the Cimeterium and bears the inscription: "Septimius Aistomodis rex Germanorum".

"Well, go on!" impatiently urged the Proconsul.

"My princely lord!" continued the Aedile, bowing, "I had to mention this before to show you that I do not leave the smallest wrinkle in the veil of this strange mystery unexamined. So Martinus, as he is called for short, went out of the city yesterday evening to make his resting place for the night in the Cimeterium at the tomb of his ancestor. When he reached the stone, that mysterious cloak-bearer was sitting on it. The latter asks him why he does not let the dead rest? He should make his night's rest among the living! When Martinus told him his misery, that this tombstone was his whole inheritance, and that he at least wanted to let his head rest in his sleep on a pillow that was his own, and that his ancestor could hardly deny him this, the ghostly man replied: "Your ancestor betrayed his people, and this stone announces his disgrace. Expiate his guilt, and the curse will depart from his head!" When Martinus asks him how he should go about it, the latter gives him a black stone, which he picks up from the ground, and says that this is hand money, and that he should wait for him tomorrow in the east of Carnunt, where the ridge reaches the crest of the mountain, waiting for further orders.

When Martinus asks him where he should rest this night, since he is denied his stone bed in the Cimeterium, he is told that he should only return to Carnunt; in every tavern he would find a bed for the night, the stone would be worth more than the cost; but he should go back to the city immediately, look at the stone only within the walls and - if his life is dear to him - not look backwards until then. He does as he is ordered. Inside the Porta Cimeterii he looks at the stone, which was sparkling gold. He now hurried to a tavern, where one of my scouts, the philosopher Aristipp, known to you, heard this

miracle tale and immediately put the man before me. After considering all the reasons, I gave him back his freedom and also allowed him to comply with the order of the ghost; for human power cannot prevent this.

The possibility of having this man watched by reliable people, in order to perhaps thereby get behind the secret, were the reasons why I let the man go. It would be unwise to use force here and thereby give the sinister case a significance in the eyes of the people, the consequences of which could bring greater dangers than if we let the matter develop unchecked. It will soon enough run into the sand and leave no trace."

The Proconsul had listened attentively to the arguments of his aedile, often looking up with incredulous admiration, but finally nodding his head in agreement. - He now spoke to Licinius: "Your communications sound like children's tales, and yet I know no better advisor than you yourself, O Licinius! Let them have their way, observe keenly, and if perhaps a favorable moment arises, then, with the strictest fulfillment of duty, immediately take decisive action. But the people need an example, we must deliver some guilty ones to the cross or to the stake. Let a blue coat wearer be caught and burned, this will be a temporary sacrifice and a warning example to the people."

"By no means, my high lord!" retorted the Aedile. "If we do this, we only fortify the belief in this one among the people more deeply; for, although the false cloak-bearer would go trembling and cowardly to his death, and the people might be told: 'Behold this impostor deceived all of us, beware of his like!' the real one would most certainly answer us and instead of intimidated people, the prestige of our power would be destroyed beyond repair! Again, O Proconsul, I tell you well-considered advice, when I urgently ask you to wait, not to let any opinion about this case be made public, but at the same time to provide everything in most tense activity and to let us by scouts of all kinds take as deep a look as possible behind the veils covering the secret."

"In this, too, I must agree with you," said Maximianus after a long reflection; "be vigilant and miss nothing!" With that he beckoned him graciously, and the Aedile stepped back.

Now the imperial master of ceremonies proclaimed the beginning of the council under tuba fanfares. The members of the council went to the throne room, and only those who did not usually belong to it stayed behind, waiting for their special call. Among them was Equitius.

The Aedile now approached the Magister armorum, confidentially wrapped his arm in that of Equnitius and strode chatting with him through the colonnades. Seemingly without purpose, he gradually drew him out of the throng to a solitary spot in the spacious tablinium.

"Have you heard talk of Mithras, the true soldier-god, before whom the best of the best in the legions bend the knee?" asked the Aedile, almost abruptly, as he found himself alone and unheard with Equitius.

Equitius looked at the Aedile in amazement and said hesitantly, "I have

heard Mithras mentioned, but I know nothing of him!"

"I'm sure you do, Magister," Licinius said mysteriously. "But I have to inform you that the brothers Milites Mithrae have recognized you as worthy to be initiated into their mysteries. To thee, Magister, I ask now, wilt thou win for thyself the noble sword of the sun, which will grant thee the gift of invincibility? Wilt thou by it become one of the best in the army of Valentinius the Great?"

Equitius did not quite understand Licinius' words, so he said evasively, "High Aedile, you ask too much! Since I breathe, I worship the king of the gods Zeus and pray to Mars, also I have never denied the sacrifice to Bromius and Venus! So I keep it out of habit. My soul would have to die like the palm tree, if you wanted to transplant it into another ground than the one in which it germinated!"

Licinius laughed out loud: "How much you misunderstand me, my young friend! I, too, belong to the Milites Mithrae, and yet I am never absent from the auguratories, never absent from the auspices; nay, I am a member of almost all the sacrificial communities of Carnuntum! Will you take hold of the brotherly hand that wants to guide you from the night to the light?"

"I do not understand you yet," was the answer of the surprised one.

"Today you walk in the dark, because the light of our teaching has not yet penetrated your heart. Do you understand it now?"

"Perhaps, but in what does the light consist?" replied Equitius, more to say something.

"My young friend," replied the Aedile Licinius, stopping and looking the latter full in the eye, "the essence of our world-embracing covenant is to learn and teach the wielding of the weapons of the mind and heart, to practice ourselves therein more and more , until we grow to the highest perfection, so that no pain, no misfortune, not even death is able to defeat us, that we preserve the calm equanimity of the soul in all situations and finally learn to expect, long for, welcome death with joy as a redeemer and liberator! More and more the knowledge of the high and noble, sublime and divine opens to the eye of the soul, the dross of earthly misery dissolves in the flames of enthusiasm, and purified our souls rise to the stars! In such unutterably blissful moments we feel the divinity stirring in us, and enthusiastically we know our soul strengthened to imperishable and therefore divine valleys! Like those of a Mucius Scävola, of a Marcus Curtius! O, there is something glorious, namelessly sublime about our divine brotherly alliance!"

Astonished, with ever-growing awe, the young warrior had listened to the

Auguratories, auspices: Sacrifices to the gods to tell the future. **Mucius Scaevola**: An assassin who stuck his hand in fire to prove his willpower. **Marcus Curtius**: a solder who sacrificed himself for the cause of the common good.

speech. When Licinius had finished, he grasped both of his hands and asked urgently with flying breath: "And you say, O my great favorable friend, that the venerable band has found me worthy to be one of theirs? You say that it depends on my yes or no whether I may enjoy this happiness? And you ask at all? Where are they that I am on my knees begging them to grant me this happiness?!"

"Stop, halt! It cannot be done so quickly! However, the first requirement for the time being is your yes! But to defend this yes steadfastly in thousandfold dangers, pains and privations, until you reach the gate, will be your next task. Wait out the trials and do no further research!"

The cunning Licinius had the guileless man where he wanted him; Equitius was blinded. Now the Aedile could use him as his willing tool. Therefore, without waiting for a reply from the confused man, he said with a mysterious expression: "I have other things to discuss with you, magister. In the next few days you will go with an emissary of the emperor to Stilifrida, the stronghold of King Gambin. Keep your eyes open there! Your keen eyesight may reveal to you things connected with the ghostly mantle-bearer and his doings in Carnunt. Do not discuss this with anyone, report it to me alone and be secretive! You may consider this - if you wish - as one of the rehearsals. Do you have another question, my future brother?"

"Worshipful one! Your words are deeply etched in my heart!" enthusiastically replied Equitius. "Questions I would have more than Diana counts silver dogs, but I must couple them that none escape me!"

"Keep valiantly in the land of the Quades, Vale!" the Aedile had said, and was about to leave lightly in greeting. Equitius, forgetting his own rank, greeted him reverently. With a slight smile, the Aedile stopped, patted Equitius on the armpit, and with a smile warned him never to forget himself; for first one must be able to govern oneself before thinking of ruling others. Thereupon the two greeted each other like friends and parted. Licinius had won the heart of the young Magister amorum. He smiled with silent pleasure as he walked out through the portico of the Hibernum Castrum onto the Altum Forum. Now he reflected complacently how beautifully he had succeeded in making Equitius his tool, and how the charm of mystery had helped him win the same. "The secret that our Mithras cave holds? Ha, ha, ha"-he laughed contentedly to himself. "And the mysteries? The same as in the theater! And the brotherhood? None other than that among the Proconsul's henchmen! Yes, yet, Licinius, we have a great mystery, by victorious Mithras! Yes, we have one! Our deep-hidden secret is, - that we have no secret!" And again he laughed. "What does he do, he flounders in the net. No better scout could I have found for things beyond the Danubius. From yonder the juggler, my pseudo-Wuotan will lift the mask! Licinius be wise, be wise, be wise!" He took it upon himself to make himself appear as if he believed rock-solidly in the haunting; indeed, he wanted everyone to believe that undeniably demonic

forces were arousing the haunting. It was certain to him that it was a daring one, who wrapped himself in the mask of the god, but he feared, if he would be outwitted by this, to lose thereby reputation, even to lose the Aedilate. He had nothing to fear from a god, for he was only a man despite his golden staff of office. But if he nevertheless succeeded in overcoming the cloak-wearing juggler, then, yes, then all Rome would have to shout: Hail to Aedil Licinius, who, mightier than Titans, conquered even a god!

Completely different thoughts and feelings moved the soul of Equitius after the Aedil left him. He sought the solitude of hidden columns to test the soaring of his soul.

A misty, uncertain something hovered before his senses. He thought he heard dreamy voices calling, he felt himself lifted up, dizzily he thought he saw the earth at his feet sink into the dim fog, only to feel the cold marble pillar again, against which he was leaning. - Stilifrida, the Blue Mantle God! - He was frightened - what was he supposed to explore? - He knew exactly the haunting and all the side circumstances; all of Carnunt spoke of it. But he had already heard the same apparitions described in his childhood. So what did the Aedile want with it? And the mysterious nature of the order? He was only allowed to tell the Aedile what he was investigating? But this one is a Mithras devotee!

Now it was obvious to him what he wanted from him, therefore this order should also be a test. Yes, he should accustom the eye of his soul to search for the trace of the divinity in order to be able to follow it, he should accustom it to look into the ray of the divine in order to prepare himself for the splendor of the full light that Licinius promised him. Again he leaned against the column, dreaming.

Then a tuba boomed. The emperor's master of ceremonies called the name of the young Magister armorum.

It took him a few moments to collect himself; then, all centurion and Magister armorum again, he followed the imperial master of ceremonies into the throne room.

"We have decided, Magister Equitius," spoke the enthroned Caesar, "to build roads and castles on the left bank of the Danubius, and for the present have set our sights on the defiant Stilifrida and the rock at the mouth of the Marahabia as the most important points. To your exploration I entrust that dangerous piece of Quadian land which turns its top like a wedge against Carnunt and endangers the safety of the colony. The Danubius and the Marahabia flow around it, and the rocky cliff fortifies it like a rampart, so that

Marcomanni, Quadi, Swabia: Various German tribal lands bordering Rome, many described by Tacitus. Marcomanni and Quadi would be mainly in present day Czech republic. **Maharabia River**: Morava river, also known as Moravia in the Czech Republic. Formerly a German speaking territory, all Germans were massacred or removed from the area in 1945.

it almost resembles a fortress. Stilifrida is hidden there and in it sits the cocky Gambinius, the king of the Quades. As king of the Marcomans and Quades, bound by treaties with the Sarmatians, Gepids and other peoples, he believes he can threaten world-conquering Rome, in the delusion of a child who, wielding his little wooden sword, thinks he is a Hector! Soon a legation from me goes to this barbarian chief to bring him gifts and letters from me.

You are in the entourage of the legation and lead the armed escort of the same. But this is only appearance, because you, Magister armorum, are in truth the head of the legation. This is enough. Explore the country on this course and determine the points for the castles, as well as the course of the roads. Show yourself worthy of the trust that Caesar Valentinian has placed in you!"

Graciously the emperor beckoned; Equitius bent one knee and kissed the hem of the emperor's cloak.

"Lord, now follow me to Nera!" said the nomenclator Sixtus, as Equitius reappeared in the tablinium.

Equitius nodded in affirmation. Soon they were standing in a dark corridor in front of a low door. Sixtus knocked softly.

The charming little Sabina let them enter and, after a cursory handshake, led Equitius into Nera's chamber. The latter had already become impatient because of the long waiting. She did not even wait for the greeting of the person entering, but measured him with a dark look, then uttered a very audible sigh and exclaimed: "Finally! I thought the high council would only end with the next solstice! No excuse! I know, I know - affairs of state, Rome's welfare, the Emperor's will - we know that! You act as if we women were only trifles and you were our only gods! Well, greetings to me!" With that, the fat slave sighed several more times and rolled over on her resting bed, as she had copied from her mistress when she was in a bad mood.

The centurion and Magister armorum, thus received in disgrace by a slave girl, bit his lips; his pride revolted, but he kept silent. It occurred to him what Sixtus had said to him at the crossroads this morning: "Still less do I forget that you shall remain Magister armorum!" This remembrance had the effect of a lash. He put his hand on his heart and bowed, as he had done before the Proconsul. In return, however, he received a more benevolent look than from the latter. Very eloquent was the greeting he now offered the aging slave. It spoke a lot about a highly wealthy protector and the influential friend and advisor of the princess.

Blushes of shame covered his face as he made this self-sacrifice. Nera was satisfied; she felt like a dominatrix. Like one, she stretched herself in the pillows and threw the folds of her tunic through each other. Her fan rustled and her eye rested complacently on the blushing man. She thought his blush came from his shyness, so she became friendly, even patronizingly kind. With a graceful wave of her fleshy right hand, she invited him to sit on a backless chair at her feet, sweetening her invitation with a miserably charming smile.

As it happens when two people have things to say to each other, which they would rather guess than listen to, before they realize how the other person will take in what the speech still hides, the conversation between the slave girl and the centurion wound in graceful turns around the still concealed purpose of the meeting. Soon, however, the cunning one realized that the young Magister, out of concern for his future, would comply with her instructions, so she decided to cut off his retreat by a bold turn.

Nera knew what she wanted and boldly headed for the target. She cradled her round head on her round shoulders with a whistling smile, mischievously threatened with her finger and lifted:

"What wicked rogues you soldiers are! There is singing, carousing, kissing; you don't care who made the song, you don't care who pressed the wine, you don't care which mouth you kiss, if it is only as red as Rhodian purple, as glowing as Hephestus' churn, as swelling as the bud of the aphrodisiac flower! It is all the same to you, if it is the mouth of a slave, it is all the same to you, if it is the mouth of a goddess or princess! Speak up Centurion, what have you dared!?"

The Centurion failed to speak, but Nera continued:

"Do not try to deny. Proven is proven!"

Then she told the completely confused man how recently - it was the day of Valentinian's entry - the Greek women of Agrippina had sung a song to him, at which she, Nera, had turned pale with fright. But being daring in love had its own license from the Olympians; for instead of being angry, the divine mistress praised, indeed she wanted to see the author of the song.

She paused. Equitius was well reassured, but not yet recovered from his astonishment; nor was he powerful of speech. Forgetting himself, he sat on the low chair, his hands clasped around his knees, and stared with wide-open eyes into the full face of the slyly smiling one.

Nera gloated over the Magister's confusion. Playing carelessly with the fan, she continued, "Who describes my horror when I found out about your ruse! You, a simple manipel leader, had dared to rise from the barracks dust to the sunny heights of Agrippina! Unheard of! Then again the gods of love came to your aid, you became Centurion, Magister amorum in one and the same day! Now I must never fear for you. Even if the distance between you and your solar goal is still enormous enough, I still trust in the protection of Ares and Aphrodite, who will probably still reduce this gap, perhaps eliminate it completely. I have dared to betray your love for my princely mistress, and - she awaits you! -"

Equitius was dizzy, he put his right hand to his forehead and jumped up.

Are you satisfied now, you upstairs?" Nera concluded her speech, smiling and folding the fan.

The Magister's face reddened deeply, and he was angry: "You are titanically

mistaken! By Hercules! Never did I make verse any more than Perseus loved the Gorgo!"

Laughing, Nera held the flat ringed hand before his mouth and said, "Remember, my naive young friend, Nera is never mistaken! When she asserts something, she wishes it to be as true as the existence of the gods, though it may not have happened any more than all the fairy tales told of them! So listen to the song you composed to Agrippina, which met with her fullest applause; it reads:

'Know and to know hereby! In the dawn of the morning
From the bed of rest, Eros has just fled!
Boy still, always talkative and fearless, shedding tears,
Laughing with scorn, and buoyant, bow-armed and nimble.
Who his father, that one does not know, but neither the ether,
Nor earth nor sea wants the wanderer for a son;
Enemy is the boy to all and hated! But now he is well -
Beware! - Nets already up, you, who are guileless, to drive!-
But he lies in wait, oh look! - When he floats on the head
Our mistress's head, does he think we see him not?'

"O, you poor prankster," Nera concluded her speech with a meaningful smile, after she had recited the little poem. "So Eros has hidden himself by the little head of the princess! - O, my poor friend! No sooner did you catch sight of him there than his arrow trembled in your heart! Well, let's hope it's not one of those with the lead tip!"

Now Equitius realized with horror the demonic trap into which he had fallen. Woe to him if he rejected that which was supposed to lure him! It would destroy him if it was turned into an accusation against him.

"Still more, however, do I think that thou shalt remain so!" had said Sixtus, and he too thought so. Nera watched her victim silently and attentively during seemingly indifferent fan and trap play. She knew she had won, so she gave him time to collect himself.

Equitius had an uphill battle with his nobler self, but his ambition finally won out. The words of his nomenclator were in the balance of the decision. -

The conversation with Nera had resumed its flow, but it had now taken on a different coloration. She became the teacher, he the docile pupil.

Not long after, Equitius was again pacing up and down in the atrium of the Hibernum Castrum.

There the slave Sabina beckoned to him and went ahead of him up the wide marble staircase, which was opposite to the one the Magister armorum had climbed this morning to reach the throne room. Equitius followed her through massive double doors the size of a city gate, over marble mosaic tile between slender columns with golden capitals, through halls and rooms of

unprecedented splendor. His footsteps thudded in the silent rooms, so that he was frightened by them and wanted to force himself to walk more quietly. But the clatter of arms and weapons disturbed him again. The high, wide rooms gave him the creeps.

Again a double door flew open, and the heavy footstep of the centurion sank noiselessly, as in the soft forest moss, in the ruffled wool of a colorful oriental carpet.

A strange chamber had welcomed the Magister armorum and his light-footed guide. It must have been the side of a large columned hall, for on one long side of the room, opposite the door, stood two richly articulated Tuscan columns that supported the precious ceiling beams. The spaces between these columns, however, were covered with colorfully woven Attalian carpets, which indicated that behind them the portico must widen like a hall.

The girl slipped quietly through the folds, leaving Equitius alone.

For the first time since his boyhood, he was overcome by a constricting feeling, his heart pounded violently and the boiling hot stream of his blood raged at his temples. He thought of escape, but only for a moment; he stayed. His mind was made up, to use every step of luck and chance to assert his rank, to raise it.

"But worry even more that you can stay," he thought he heard the words of his nomenclator whispered from the carpet vault, and he stayed.

The curtains between the columns rustled back, giving the newly surprised man a dazzling view of the columned hall. He stood silent and motionless. Fortunately for him, the process was also calculated to have a mind-boggling effect on him.

A moderately large portico, like that of a temple, its column shafts connected by Attalian carpets, opened before his uncertain gaze. Tautly stretched translucent rose-red silks behind the capitals filled the chamber with Aurora's rose light.

In the enchanting chiaroscuro of this room stood devices of a magnificence, a splendor, which the eye of the common soldier could not grasp. The sweet fragrance, which half stunned, half intoxicated him, made everything blur into one another. Everything dizzily revolved around a sun, around a goddess, and this goddess was Agrippina, the proconsul.

Poured out like the foam-born herself, dressed in the most delicate greek fabric, on whose shimmering foam-white folds silver stars seemed to float, half-covered by a silk cloak, which sometimes shimmered in the color of the dove, sometimes in that of the peacock, nestling against the noble forms, she appeared to the soldier, who was not accustomed to such a sight, like a being of divine nature.

With uncanny calmness, the beautiful woman lay on the lectus, feasting on the completely confused Equitius, who could not escape the fetters in which

Aphrodite's divine power had beaten him.

Poor Equitius did not know how to help himself. He grabbed his helmet, tore it from his head to free his raging temples from its pressure and to cool his burning forehead. Gasping for breath, he sent pleading glances at the demonically beautiful woman, who simultaneously attracted him and kept him away again with the cruel play of her eye. Silently and yet again eloquently he begged her for the redeeming word. Finally seized by demonic force, he rushed forward to the camp, where he sank to his knees, kissing the hem of her robe, bowing his head to the earth to protect his eye from a sight it thought it could not bear. Motionless he remained in this position.

Then he felt a soft woman's hand on his head, while he heard a gentle woman's voice say: "Rise, my handsome centurion! Of soldiers I appreciate the courageous flashing eye, the bold deed! Pining grant Arcadian shepherds and beardless boys! Brave eye raised, my Equitius, nor have I heard the voice of him who sang me this song!"

Equitius lifted his head.

Then, behind the Attalian tapestry, at first softly, then more clearly and loudly, the sounds of the trigonons and the cithars sounded in ever-fuller chords, swelling to a beautifully articulated melody, into which, carried by four bell-bright girls' voices, a song fell that closed with the verses:

-------When he floats by the head
Our lady's head, does he think we do not see him?

The long silk lashes fluttered around Agrippina's eyes, which rested dreamily on the handsome soldier, while her hand played lightly in his curls. - Suddenly she fluttered her lashes fully open. With searing fire, her eyes sank deep into the centurion's heart.

Staggering, Equitius went up, seized Agrippina's hand, which he pressed impetuously to his lips, whereupon, unconsciously keeping her hand in his, he exclaimed, drunk with delight: "Divine princess, adored mistress! Kill me, goddess, no man can bear a gods' fate!"

"Childish gusher!" said the princess with a friendly smile. "There, sit down beside me on those cushions, and tell me how then you began to become Magister armorum? Your appointment as Centurion is already known to me!" With that, she pushed Equitius down on the arched chair standing at her head. Grasping his hand and playfully pulling it down to her, she forced him to sit in a bent-over posture so that his face came to stand just above hers. Thus he remained continually exposed to the play of her fiery eyes; her hot breath blew numbly around his temples.

"Well, tell, then, my Equitius, tell, I am listening!" Breathing heavily, in a clenched voice, the latter began to tell, "As Thou commandest. Thy slave, O

goddess, obey. It was on the day of the arrival of our gracious emperor. The legions marched out of the Porta decumana down to the south, following the road that leads to Scarabantia (Ödenburg). There, an incalculable plain widens. The individual cohorts break up in batches and swarm out. Then they gather again in fixed columns, swinging here and there and carrying out all movements as if to deceive an enemy or to dare a battle. The emperor personally orders all these exercises, sometimes on foot, sometimes on horseback. There as commander, here as common legionary, he is everywhere in every guise. In doing so, he refuses all refreshment and responds to the urgent admonitions of your high husband, O princess, with the words: 'I am a soldier; I have taken my sword, but not the golden laurel!' - The army is delighted with such a Caesar! It would be able to storm Olympus for him like the Titans and to conquer Tartarus. There is only one Valentinian!"

As Equitius had thus talked himself into enthusiasm, Agrippina's eyes sparkled with consuming ardor, then the long lashes veiled her demanding looks. Now she said, "Tell that to your comrades! How did you become Magister Armorum? That's what I want to know!"

Equitius gave a deep sigh of relief and went on to tell how the emperor had finally given the cohorts rest. He then gathered the army commanders and captains around him to test them for benevolence and knowledge under the semblance of a council of war. It was necessary to determine the point where to make camp. Each individual had to answer and justify this question.

Agrippina had listened with apparent participation up to this point, although she had paid the greater attention to the play of her eyes. Now, however, what had been told had powerfully touched her herself; she opened her eyes full to Equitius and asked: "Was my son Marcellianus also among those questioned, my Equitius? Speak, speak the truth unashamedly!"

Deep blushes went up from cheeks to temples to Equitius' forehead. With a pleading glance at his tormentor he said, "Have pity on me, divine Agrippina, and remit to me the answer to this question!"

"And if I ask it of Thee!" At this her dark eyes shone so softly and imploringly that he could not resist. With averted eyes he said:

"How painful it is to me to have to give you, O adored Agrippina, this slight! Marcellianus was not only among those tested, he was also the one who received the most bitter rebuke from the emperor! But leave me the rest!"

Tenderly Agrippina pressed the young man's hand, sent up a fervently eloquent look to him and said: "My dear, good Equitius! How I thank thee for thy truth! Be my friend! I lack such a one, and no one dares to tell me truth! Announce to me the imperial words of censure!"

"My princess -"

"Call me not so, my dear, my dear Equitius! Be my friend, I will be your friend, call me your dear Agrippina!"

"My exalted patron goddess, my dear Agrippina!" said Equitius, with

glowing cheeks, covering with hot kisses the fine, delicate hand of the seductive woman. "I will try to gather my memory, for thy nearness confounds me when I shall announce such things; I feel as if I am murderously lowering steel into thy heart!" At this a deep soulful look met her eye, which again flashed round. Equitius continued: "The emperor said: 'as long as there have been Roman legions, as long as there have been war tribunes in those legions, so long might no such rash advice have been given to make camp as you, Marcellianus, have given.' It would not be possible to play into the hands of the enemy more advantages over himself than you wished to do, unless you sent a legation to him with the request to capture you graciously! Tell your father to send you to school yet!'" Afflicted, Equitius looked down upon Agrippina; but she, without batting an eyelash, said, "Well, I thank thee, my dear Equitius, I know enough; but tell me now of thee, this to know I burn with curiosity!" At this she opened her eyes again, and tender looks delighted Equitius: "My dear adored Agrippina! You are not angry with me, are you!" A fearful questioning look accompanied these words, but a tender pressure of the small soft hand, which pressed his to her heart, replaced the answer. Equitius began anew: "At my suggestions the emperor nodded with satisfaction, made expositions here and there, but I did not allow myself to be misled, and I convinced the emperor each time in such a way that he admitted with rare frankness that he had been mistaken. Finally, however, he drew my attention - probably only in pretense - to the difficulties of my proposals. I replied that a Roman soldier, a Roman centurion knows no impossibility! I am a Roman and this is only an unwilling rock! If you, my emperor, show me the favor of finding my plan good, then grace me with the order to carry it out. Thou shalt see a camp pitched on this rocky ground in the same time in which thou art accustomed to see one grow out of the sands of the Libyan desert!' The emperor looked me in the face, smiling incredulously, and said: 'You are bold, Centurion! Here, where you know we can wait, it is easy to speak; but when battle tumult overtakes you, the case is somewhat more difficult!' Annoyed, offended by these words, which rang in my ears like scorn, I cried out excitedly: 'What hinders thee, O Caesar, to let me be overthrown by the tumult of arms?' Let the auxiliary troops storm; while cavalry and some foot soldiers hold them off, I will make my camp, also be ready in time!' The emperor looked me in the eye with astonishment when I stood so defiantly before him, then he smiled, patted me on the shoulder and said: I like you, that's what an honest soldier says to his emperor! Now it was time to work. I staked out, and the emperor himself led the auxiliary soldiers to the storm. The cohorts held; he stormed in vain. I entrenched, returned to the mock battle every free minute and won back every advantage from the emperor. At last the camp was ready. Where there are usually ramparts, there were walls, and what walls! Now I called in the cohorts, had them quickly fed, and when the team was sated and fortified, we marched toward the emperor with loud

shouts. In the meantime, the emperor had beaten the cavalry, which we took into our quickly opened ranks and again stood in a closed battle line ready to weather any storm! Now the emperor blows off, steps towards me, pats me on the shoulder again and says: 'You have won your game, and I pay you the winnings here by appointing you Magister Armorum!' This, my dearest royal friend, is how I became Magister Armorum!"

He had talked himself into full enthusiasm, not noticing how Agrippina listened to his words with growing excitement, oblivious. She had stopped the play of the eyes, which now clung in natural ardor desiringly to the soldier resplendent in the noblest masculine beauty. Equitius plunged his flaming gaze into Agrippina's glowing eyes; he lowered his head to hers. Two swan-white arms snaked about his neck, pressing him with hasty embrace to her tumultuous heaving bosom. Two pairs of lips met in passionate kisses.

Softly whispering, gently swaying chords emanated from behind the curtains; the most intoxicating fragrances of the Orient escaped from the incense bowls.

Fifth Chapter

Wotan's Army

Disheveled, torn wisps of clouds chased through the realm of the air raged by the howling storm. Only rarely did a few brave moonbeams manage to penetrate the dense darkness, only to sink again immediately into a furious flood of thunder. Bright lightning flashed, rumbling thunder rolled over the land. Each flash of lightning illuminated a different image of the gigantic turmoil of nature: now the foaming swirl of the roaring river, in which deep sea-blue funnels appeared lined with ghostly pale spray, now again the mighty trees of the floodplain forest, which groaned and heaved before the mighty wings of the storm, while the crashing of shattered trunks mingled with the rumbling of the booming thunder. Now a flashing ray of weather was striking down on a city tower so that its battlements were flowing into the moat as if they were molten lead.

The clouds poured down rain without a sluice, the air seemed to have become water, which roared in a stormy fury around towers and gables, hissing on streets and squares, spraying in the clapping impact and mingling again with the crashing torrent.

Wrapped in their dripping sagums, the patrols of legionary soldiers marched through the deserted streets of the Castle and the civil town of Carnuntum. Silently and sullenly they strode along in time, now and then relieving their uneasy doings by a powerful pithy curse on the rainy homeland of the bears, which they cursed into that unknown territory where, according to the wise Pliny, people with tails dwell, whom such miserable bear weather stand heartily without grudge.

Sagum: A Roman military cloak.

The sentries on the towers had it no better. No projecting ledge, no corner of the wall offered protection, not even the so strictly forbidden, but nevertheless practiced, artificial fastening of the shield as a protective cover in some corner of the wall with the help of sword, dagger and pilum.

So it was that two legionaries stood on guard on the easternmost tower of the civilian city, right on the river's edge, sharply peering out between the deep battlements through fog and night gloom.

Soon they were looking out over the river and across it into the land of the defiant Quades, where clouds and trees flowed into one another to form an inextricable shadow; soon they were looking down along the ridge, which ran as a matte stripe through the misty gray land, visible only when the lightning flashed. Then they looked over the battlements and gables of Carnunt in the light of the flying thunderbolts, up to where the gently curving forest mountains rise, behind which, down in the south, the blue Adriatic waves lap sunny Italia.

"May Zeus punish me for this!" rumbled one of the two legionaries, shaking himself so that the water splashed from joints and grooves of the armor, ...May Zeus and all the gods punish me for leaving my golden Sicily, trusting the lying mouths of advertising scoundrels, to drown here in barbarian land on a tower pinnacle!"

While he was thus venting his displeasure, his comrade peeped out without giving him any answer.

To the southwest, his eye had caught something that fully engaged him. There, above the gables and battlements of the civilian city, the forms of the Quadrivium Sylvanium (1) stood out in broad silhouette against the misty background, through which only the Grave Street and the Cimeterium with their pale memorial stones were dimly discernible.

Flashes of lightning, rapidly following each other, just illuminated the area again. Then it became clear to him. It wasn't the shreds of fog that were moving through the area, but a cavalcade of horsemen on white steeds with ghostly, shimmering weapons.

"By the head of the Gorgon!" he now exclaimed, grabbing his still cursing comrade by the armpit. "There, do you behold nothing?"

"By the Baculus, nothing that could concern me!" was the other's reply.

"But you must see them, the horsemen!" the former replied.

"Leave me in peace, I have no desire to leave behind the wine jug tomorrow, instead to report to all, from the Manipel leader upwards to the Emperor, what I have not seen and what I have not monkeyed with. It's fog!"

"No, no, it's not fog! They are already coming closer, they are horsemen

Pilum: A Roman javelin. Essentially they would make an umbrella of their shield to avoid the rain.

1. Today its ruins are known as Heidentor near Petronell.

and they are Germanic! All of them on white horses. Behold, already I can count them. The front one, he carries something white in front of him, then - wait -yes eleven horsemen follow the first, and do you see there the two dogs - white - and Mars stand by us - there the two ravens, he, it's him, the wonderful one! Quickly the horn!"

"Are you out of your mind, fellow?! I see nothing, and if so, let them ride! On other towers, nearer than ours, there are guards, too, who shall blow the alarm. I have no desire to ruin my symposium tomorrow!"

But the other had already seized a huge bugle and was struggling in vain to match his human strength with the roaring storm and the rumble of thunder. He tried to light a signal fire, but this endeavor was also impracticable. At last he decided to use the last means of information which only particularly important cases allowed him. He left his post on his own authority to report to the Manipel leader inside the tower, who was keeping watch. The latter immediately entered the platform of the tower with the soldier and confirmed what he had seen. And since the procession was now moving around the city wall and heading straight for the tower, the three soldiers also saw every detail of it clearly. Therefore, the Manipel leader immediately ordered a messenger to the commandant's office for an immediate report.

Now the cavalcade of horsemen, which came galloping towards the tower, making a racket with the thunder and trying to drown it out with the barking of dogs and the crack of whips, had just arrived under the tower. As if there was neither a castle nor a Roman soldier on guard for them, so unabashedly did they go about their mad business right next to Carnunt's towers and walls, which were guarded like a sanctuary. But what are they doing now? The three soldiers' hair stood on end. They can't be human beings who undertake such unheard-of dares. They ride uninhibited to the banks of the river, sit down from the remains, lean one plank and then another against a Liburna, drive the horses into it, push off the beach, and before the guards in the harbor know quite what has happened, the Liburna has already disappeared from their sight. The horrified guards saw with a shudder two white* ravens circling the top of the mast of the Liburna.

The storm raged terribly, howling as it bored into the surging waters of the stream, and torn balls of clouds chased by as if torn apart by fiery whip lashes, and with whimpers and whistles others hurried after, as if they wanted to seek their salvation in frantic flight.

"Did you see him, the wild hunter?! That was Wotan's army; with Wotan and Frau Perahta! May Zeus and the Capitoline gods protect us, the genius loci

Liburna: A Roman ship

*The text intermittently makes reference to Huginn and Muninn as white crows; this may be a translation error, or perhaps Odin's ravens and wolves were attested as white in color in the German legends.

might be too weak!", shouted with all the signs of terror the soldier who fetched the Manipel leader. After raising his arms above his head in a prayerful position and bending his right knee, he rose and made a gesture of counter-charm. He stuck out his tongue as far as possible from his open mouth and held his fan-like hand to his nose with his thumb, his little finger pointing in the direction in which the Liburna had disappeared. The other two soldiers silently did similar.

The rain had subsided, the thunder had died down. Only isolated gusts of wind still announced that the weather had passed. Between the wide wounds which the storm had torn in the frayed mantle of clouds, the holy star of foam-born Aphrodite poured down its mild, reconciling light on the calmed nature.

On the morning of the same day, which that terrible stormy night had concluded, at about the same time when the Aedile Licinius reported to the Proconsul in the Hibernum Castrum about the strange adventure of Aistmuth at the tombstone of his ancestor, Aistmuth was released from custody.

Not only had they forgotten to give him back the treasure gold that had been taken from him yesterday, but they did not even think of giving him a morning snack. But even though Aistmuth felt the loss painfully, he was at the same time glad that the door of the cell opened to him so unexpectedly soon, and he strode out of the city almost happily. It did not matter that his stomach growled; he was used to it, and the freedom of an empty stomach was still better than the hospitality of a damp hole of the Municipal palace. He strode sprightly under the cross vault of the Quadrivium-Sylvanian temple, full of hope for Wuotan's help; it was perfectly clear to him that it had been Wuotan who had so wonderfully gifted him yesterday at the tombstone of his ancestor.

For a long time he had the Quadrivium at his back and had already followed the dusty trade road for a good distance, when he suddenly stopped, clenching his fists, undecided whether he should strike down with a powerful blow the one he had just caught up with or not. This second wanderer was Aristipp the philosopher. Aistmuth had not yet decided how he should strike down his mortal enemy, whether with his fist or with the iron sword, or whether a solid kick would not suffice for the wretch, when he happened to turn around. The violent fright that befell Aristipp was betrayed by his sudden paling and trembling. He believed himself lost. That Aistmuth would take revenge for handing him over to the Aedil yesterday was only too understandable to him. But with his characteristic impudence he soon hid his

Frau Perahta: Another name for Perchta, Frau Holle, or Freya/Frigga. A female archetype of beauty and trainer of animals.

Genius Loci: The protective spirit of a particular place

fear and met Aistmuth with well feigned joy. He stretched out both hands to him and shouted: "I greet the innocent with a thousand hails. By Zeno and Krates, how my heart bled when I had to take you for a traitor yesterday. Hail to the Roman law, it crushes the guilty, but it also raises innocence! Hail once again to you, noble king's scion!"

With an angry look the addressed measured him, then turned away contemptuously and said: "Aistmuth is much too noble to send an unseemly monster with his royal hands to Hel; it would be too much of an honor! Go!" Proudly he straightened himself up and strode past the philosopher without giving him a second glance.

The latter was glad to have escaped the danger. To become aware of the humiliation, he would have needed the feeling of shame. But it was not this that made him blush and clench his fists, but the angry realization of his powerlessness here on the road, where he could not call the Aedile's henchmen to his aid. Half aloud, so that the person who had been deprived would not hear, he gritted out between his teeth: "Just you wait. You royal burden-bearer, you shall be thought of! By the wrathful God of my fathers! To the panther of the arena you shall fall! Mark this day, my flaxen beard!"

Aistmuth had hurried far ahead of the Aedile's scout. Now he had reached that place where the commercial road forked. To the left it swung around Carnunt's walls to reach the ridge, to the right it formed the chord of the mighty arc which the Limes described, and continued over the rocky crest of the Stone at its deepest dip to reach Arrabona by this shorter route.

Aistmuth followed this turnoff. With a gentle incline, the road led through the lush green of the vines up the hills, where, scattered among the friendly vineyards (1), the cheerful villas of the Carnunter shone in the laughing early morning sunshine. Aistmuth stopped, for the sight pleased him. "The time will come," he said in self-congratulation, "when the Roman will have to leave here, and then the vine will be his gift as a guest. Our grandchildren's grandchildren shall still feast on it and gratefully remember the sword's day's work, which is incumbent upon us to do." He strode on, happily animated. His rusty sword sounded brightly in its sling, as if it were looking forward to the forthcoming red drink in the turmoil of battle.

Then he stopped in amazement. "By the Ages, what is this building? Never yet did my eye see it!" He had beheld a strange round building (2). This was how his ancestors had built their houses centuries ago. He knew them probably from the Aurelianssäule in Rome, which he looked once upon. There they are depicted watching the Roman warrior put the fire torch to them. Since

Herian: Another name for Odin, especially when Odin is leading soldiers.

1) Emperor Probus (276-282) built here, according to others on the slopes of the mons Cetius (Zeizzoberg, today Kahlenberg near Vienna) the first vines. The wine culture in these areas survived all the storms of the people until today without interruption.

then, however, his countrymen built wooden houses in a square, and only the temple buildings had faithfully preserved the beehive shape from ancient times. But where did this round building with the double door and no window opening come from? Now he looked closer. One of the two doors was open; on its threshold sat the man in the blue coat with the gray head.

Aistmuth had gone out to await the ghostly tombstone rider here, he knew that he would meet him here, yet he had remained transfixed with fright at the spot where the surprising sight had become him.

With a wavering gait, he hesitantly approached the enigmatic and bent his knee before him.

"Well do I, Aistmuth, suspect thy fate, well do I know the nailworm raging in thy starving stomach! Staying overnight as a guest of the Aedile, you were deprived of breakfast, and it was considered good to treat themselves to your gold. Go to the gulf of my hospitable hall and satisfy your hunger!"

Thus said Erchantaug to the kneeling man. The latter rose silently and wanted to accept the invitation, but the one sitting on the threshold now resisted him with a commanding movement of his hand and said:

"Stay and heed the word of warning! He who rests in Erchantaug's round hall has lost to him life and limb, head, neck and hand, skin and hair! You can still choose the way according to your will. Back you can walk, back to dragging sacks there in Carnunt, you can sleep on stones of grayish graves, you can beg bread and finally feed the lion as food. - Stay or dig, true the word of warning!"

Aistmuth prostrated himself before Erchantaug, kissing the hem of his cloak; then, still kneeling, he cried: "Most holy Herian! Well do I heed Thy word, but I follow Thee joyfully!" Again he rose to enter the round hall, but again the gray one resisted him:

"Wait and hear! Know Herian's wish beforehand. If you honestly vow to keep the promise holy with a pure oath, riches will be your lot; in your later

2) On the Antonius Column in Rome, whole villages and towns with such beehive-like huts appear. These were woven from willow, plastered with clay on the outside and inside and covered with a shiny layer of brightly colored paint. At the time of Valentinian, the Germanic people had already learned to build with wood, and their houses were similar to the wooden houses still in use in the Alpine countries. They had delicately carved columns with stair railings, altars and richly decorated breezeways (wimperge). As everywhere the religion and everything that belongs to its cult was and is the most conservative, so also here. The cultural buildings remained such round buildings long into the Christian era, the forms of which later also passed into stone architecture, as the oldest local form of the church buildings themselves. Therefore it is explained that the oldest churches of the country in numerous still preserved examples are such rotundas, or nevertheless constructed on a polygon approaching the circular form. At the place where the above-mentioned circular building of Erchantaug is assumed, stands today the venerable round chapel of "Deutsch-Altenburg". It was restored by the Viennese students in 1848.

years you will inherit house and farm with man and mouse, with golden horned flocks. If you violate the vow, you go to Helia's frost-trembling home to eternal servitude and lamentation. Un-reluctant and unconfirmed you follow Wuotan's trail, forget the questions why and wherefore, whence and whither. Hear Herian's council, look and be silent, awake and true! In Herian's mountain you will find the sunken castle, Walfather's swift horses, rich rings of shining gold, weapons for the wall, noble food and excellent liquor, in future days a kissable wife, noble heirs and one day a blissful seat in the shield hall of Walhalla! If you want this fate, then keep the word with staffed oaths and drink the holy blood!

"Consecrate me, Wuotan, to the eternal great and blue journeyman! I take the most constant vow, in the drinking of the blood potion!" shouted with enthusiasm the outsider. Erchantaug solemnly rose slowly and disappeared into the round building, closing its gate behind him.

Soon it opened anew.

Erchantaug carried a filled Meadhorn in his left hand, a sacrificial knife in his right.

Seriously and silently he handed the horn to the outsider across the threshold, grasped the sacrificial knife with his left hand and plunged it into his right upper arm. A jet of red lifeblood gushed forth. Now he took the horn and handed the knife to Aistmuth, while he himself let the blood trickle into the horn. The other did the same; his blood also flowed into the meadhorn, which now overflowed and sprinkled the threshold with a mixture of mead and blood. Both of them now stepped into the blood on the threshold, entwined their arms, and while their blood trickled down mingling, Erchantaug chanted the Ring Oath, which Aistmuth solemnly chanted:

"Blood to blood
Mingles with the mead,
Governing and upholding
Allfather's will.
Be faithful
One to the other,
One man's friend,
The other's friend;
One man's enemy,
The other's enemy;
In storm and stream,
By weather and wind,
By fire and frost,
By earth and ice;
We swear by the sword,
Steadfastly staffed,

To the strongest staff,
With whispering speech,
The rune-ring oath!
Walfather reigning
Aistmuth foreboding.
Raising and preserving
Allfather's will,
Mingles the spirit
Blood to blood!"

Now both drank the horn empty together until the final taste, whereupon Erchantaug took Aistmuth by the hand and led him into the interior of the round building.

They had not yet reached the center of the hall, when Aristipp appeared at the threshold, and with astonished, inquiring looks, murmured the words: "This is worth the effort of the walk, the Aedil will thank me for it. So the nest would be found!" He could not resist curiosity and entered. At the same moment, however, the floor opened under Aristipp's feet; with a shrill cry he was gone, whereupon the trapdoor closed again, without the slightest trace betraying where it concealed the abyss.

Aistmuth was stunned, unable to utter a word. A few moments ago, he too had walked there with the mysterious wooer, to whom he had sworn life and limb to unbreakable loyalty. Without his noticing the slightest precaution, the ground swallowed him who entered a few steps later. An involuntary horror seized him and paralyzed his tongue.

But even now Erchantaug kept his frightening calm. As if nothing had happened, he cold-bloodedly closed the door. Without devoting even a word to the event, he approached Aistmuth again, to whom he directed some bear skins spread over forest moss, which made the round bench a soft seat.

Intimidated, Aistmuth sat down on the skins behind the heavy oak table and eagerly followed the further actions of his host.

Silently, he placed fluffy white bread in front of his guest and handed him a full mead horn. Then he strode to the cauldron hanging over the fire in the middle of the hall, and with his short sword reached out from its bubbling contents mighty pieces of broth meat, which he placed in a bowl in front of Aistmuth. He then sat down in silence and watched Aistmuth's every move.

The scent of the mead as well as the long-desired meat soon conquered the hungry man's shyness; he took a bite. Soon the bowl and horn were emptied and the bread consumed. Silently Erchantaug filled his horn and bowl again. The features of the old gray man became more and more satisfied, more and more friendly, the more he saw what quantities of mead his guest could manage without succumbing. He was pleased by the blissful pleasure with which the feasting man indulged in the long-weaned abundance, completely

forgetting what surrounded him.

Aistmuth was sated and stretched comfortably on his seat. Silently Erchantaug took the horn, which had been emptied again, and unnoticed poured the contents of a small bottle into it, whereupon he filled it with mead. Aistmuth received the horn from the hands of the silent one with a smile of happiness, and emptying it with a bold draught, he gave it back to Erchantaug with the words: "Have thanks, Erchantaug or Wuotan, for the mead and drink! If nothing remained of all your promises but daily such a meal, such excellent drink, never would my oath repent me!"

Silently Erchantaug stood before him, erect in his powerful greatness. Aistmuth stared into the one eye he felt resting on him. He did not know what happened to him. He wanted to raise the horn again to his mouth, but then he saw how the ghostly man raised his right hand calmly against him; the hand with the horn sank powerlessly into his lap and leaden sleep settled on his senses.------

When Erchantaug noticed that Aistmuth, defeated by the sleeping draught, had lost his senses, his nature suddenly changed again. The solemn dignified calmness was followed by the nimblest agitation of stormy youth. Quickly the door was locked and the trapboard was thrown back, which Aristipp had let slide to the depth. A well-like shaft had been hidden underneath. On one side of this shaft, Erchantaug opened another trapdoor, which closed an inclined shaft, so that the latter had one and the same mouth with the well shaft. The drop board of the inclined shaft now bridged the vertically lowered shaft and made the entrance into the inclined shaft completely safe.

Now Erchantaug lifted the stunned man from the bear skins and carried him to the inclined shaft, into which he let him slide down. Then he himself followed, carefully closing the inclined shaft again, whereupon the drop board of the well shaft closed again of its own accord, in order to trap uncalled intruders as it had shortly before the scout of the Aedile of Carnunt. Having reached the end of the sloping shaft, Erchantaug took the unconscious man on his back and covered many hundred paces in deepest darkness, trusting only his sense of touch. Finally, he opened another plank door and stepped with his burden into a lighted room.

It was a moderately large chamber in a quadrangle, surrounded all around with benches of clay. Opposite the entrance, however, at the back of the chamber, this surrounding clay bench was widened to a step sloping upward toward the back, bed-like. On this inclined surface, forest moss and bear skins had prepared a comfortable bed, apparently already intended for Aistmuth. Weapons and precious armor stood next to some rare equipment on the clay benches along with some magnificent pieces. Also a drinking horn filled with mead, resting on silver lion feet, awaited the sleeper. Erchantaug had laid the dream captive on the bed. There he took his rusty ancestral sword from him, put it in a rich hanger with a splendid belt and placed it among the other

weapons on the clay bench. Then he stripped Aistmuth of his poor animal skins and wrapped both upper arms of the completely undressed man with gold snakes. Now he gathered up the meager belongings taken from Aistmuth, tied them into a bundle and put a small tablet of birch bark into it, into which he carved Aistmuth's name. After all this was done, Erchantaug lit a small hand lamp with the lamp that illuminated the chamber, whereupon he left the room with the bundle and locked it from the outside.

Again he passed through several corridors, threw Aistmuth's bundle into a chamber, which already contained a considerable number of similar bundles, and then continued his wandering through the maze of corridors.

Now he again opened a plank door and shone into a chimney-like room, which seemed to lead indeterminably to the height as well as to the depth, for deep shadows limited the view both downward and upward.

Cries of despair mixed with ghoulish curses now struck his ear; it rustled as if an angry beast were rolling in the straw.

Erchantaug called down: "Haio! What's the commotion in my castle? Will you keep quiet down there, you unpleasant guest?"

When the raving man heard himself called, he uttered a flood of imprecations until his speech failed him and only gurgling sounds muffled by animal rage were audible. Erchantaug had been waiting for this. Now he shouted down into the dark maw of the shaft:

"I can wait until you are calm and docile. Tomorrow at the same hour I will come again, and when you are subdued then, hunger and thirst shall never torment you, since you are now my guest. One more thing! Remember, you uninvited, move gently to the wall, it could be that you will have company, and it would be awkward if such fell on your nose. Be well!"

With that, Erchantaug slammed the plank door noisily shut, while an angry roar came up from the darkness.

Erchantaug now turned his steps toward the round chamber with the three plank doors, in order to get out of it into another part of the sunken castle.

Again he stood before a closed gate; he opened it noiselessly and entered. -

Bright splendor flooded this hall, whose splendor could compete with the shining halls of the Hibernum Castrum.

The hall was quadrangular. Supported by four columns, the pointed dome reached upwards. Behind the columns ran a moderate circular walkway, and on each side wall a seating niche had been broken out and covered with purple cushions. The walls were covered with blue silk wallpaper with embroidered silver letters, while the vault appeared to be misted with a brilliant light-blue colored light. The floor was covered with soft wool carpets of the Orient just as in the Proconsul's chamber. In the center of the hall floated a mighty chandelier of cast ore, studded with precious wax candles.

Opposite the entrance, half hidden by purple drapery, opened an alcove,

whose clay benches widened at the back wall, as in Aistmuth's hall, to form a storage area. This, however, was furnished with ample cushions whose dazzling white would put a swan's plumage to shame.

An enchanting heavenly picture offered itself to the unnoticed one entered here in the hidden bosom of the earth. Is it Nanna who mourns with Hel for her Baldur? Is it Iduna, Hirmon's divine spouse, who sank from Yggdrasil? Princessely suppleness and silken robe adorn the lovely one, whose sea-blue fairy-tale eyes, dream-enshrouded in the blissful oblivion of the present, hangs on dear images that fill her soul. Her little hands rest in her lap and the spindle has slid to the ground.

Powerfully moved by the enchanting sight of Gisalhild, Erchantaug stood motionless leaning against one of the pillars. The waking dreamer had not seen him.

To him it is as if the seven goddesses of love hovered around this sea-clarified mirror of the heavenly Fraya.

There floats Gefjon, the hardly blossomed virgin. She protected you, you budding female blossom in the guard of the paternal castle, then from the poisonous breath in Edonen's tavern, where she sent you a savior at the good hour. She blows by blessingly like the scent of flowers, followed by the second of the seven, by Snotra. This one also endows you. Feminine grace and beauty as the charming word in the speech full of innocence are gifts from her. It is she, too, who showed your image to the loving youth and placed his image in your heart, foreboding, which your eye has never seen. A roses' smile on thee, and Snotra parts. But Sjöfna, the third, follows in the fair round dance entwined with rose threads. She will kindle the spark, which Snotra ignites in your hearts, to a bright flame, in hot embers your hearts will merge into one, if hostile powers do not treacherously separate them, that the healing fire becomes the very one, and the separated hearts individually scorch, wither. It is she who with love's lust and sorrow agonizingly gladdens your hearts, soon lifting them up to the stars in joyous swirling delight, soon plunging them down into the depths of love's anguish and worrying doubt. It is she who steels your hearts for coming destiny, who ennobles the girl to virginity, the youth to manhood! If you have passed the acid test of love, Germanic girl, then the fourth of the seven, the happy Lofn, will consecrate you to the man, who loves you, with the ring, which bears her name, by the engagement. That most powerful Asin after Freya is followed protectively by the watchful Var, who kept your oaths with flaming runes in your hearts. She is the all-pervading clairvoyant who inflicts vengeful punishment on untrue oaths or betrayals. And still another mighty noble goddess hovers as the sixth in the rose round dance of the celestials, before the highly holy Freya herself concludes it. It is she who guards the sanctuary of the bridal chamber, pairing high seriousness and severity with friendly mildness. You have also experienced her protection, you lovely dreamer on the purple cushions, in the house of Edonen. She

spreads her rosy elfin arms over you, the divinely pure Syna. She closes the chamber and refuses the entrance to everyone who wants to enjoy the pleasures of love maliciously. One day it will be Syna the gracious one, who will escort the sensual girl in the rosiest radiance of the all-gilding love to Freya's sacred bridal chamber! Now the most powerful goddess herself in the mild splendor closes the round dance of the goddesses: Freya, the most charming goddess born from the rippling deep-blue tides, from the shining wave foam of the holy stream in primeval days, she, whose reflection you most charming girl bud yourself, whose darling you are, she now approaches you with blessings and denies your eye to look at what is to come.

Erchantaug stands before the ravishing sight of the pensive girl as before a most holy goddess herself. His heart beats faster, his pulses fly feverishly, and with a thousand forces he is drawn to sink at her feet, to confess his ardent love to her! But may he betray his secret, may he appear to this girl in his true form, may he speak even the one word which, discovering his love, might turn his sorrow around? No, he must not, not even confess to this girl that he is a man with a warm heart, like other men! In a few days he will return her to her father, and then lonely, lonely mourn for her! Then these rooms will be desolate again, even more desolate than before, the only star that lit their night, she will be gone from them forever! But who will prevent him to keep her here, to cast off the deceptive shell and to become for her again a man like other men, a loving, yes, the only man? No, never, never, rather renounce her! How could he find the courage to impose such a sacrifice on her, to expect her to renounce forever the bright sun, the laughing corridors and the resinous fragrance of the sacred forests? "No, never shall she know what this heart feels for her, and whether even elvish power urges me to tell her with a thousand tongues how I love her!------Love!? Love! - May I then love, I, the consecrated of the gods, love? What said his eighteenth runestaff?

The eighteenth I will never, ever
To a woman or a girl declare
That is the best resolution of songs:
What one of all only knows,
Except the woman that embraces me anyway,
Or is sister to me.

Yes, thank me, my father of fate! The spirit of thy riddle-runes blows around me at the hour of sending, and clear it is now, the eighteenth rune! Clear as the highest peaks of the ice mountains bathe in the sea of fire of his one eye, when the cloak of invisibility, which denied the mortal eye to look into the sun's distance, is blown away!

Only to you and to the woman who surrounds you eternally, only to you, the solar air, and to her, the all-mother earth, the rune of the return, of the rejuvenation in the love, of the rebirth is unraveled! You have not denied me, no, commanded me to rejuvenate in future generations, in order to be able to complete my work. In the change of the sexes Your spirit shall always be reborn, in order to complete Your work, for which a human age is too short. As the tree always greens and blossoms after every winter, as Iduna returns to the top of Yggdrasil from which she sank, as at Yule the gods rise from the depths, so also I shall return from the night of sleep until the time when the Yggdrasil falls! Now, now I am completely you, your divinity fills my soul, the veils sink, and I know myself immortal! You yourself and Frouwa gave her to me as a bride!

With a name I never call myself; I am deceiver and liar! She is not yet able to grasp my high secret, therefore I must deceive her!

Today she shall leave these rooms and only return as queen when this sunken castle rises from the earth, its battlements bathing in the blue skies, and spreads its shield over the liberated heritage of the glorious Osterland."

He sent another heartfelt look at the fair maidenflower; then he left the hall unnoticed, as he had entered it.

He had reached his chamber. Again steed, dogs, and ravens greeted him; but only briefly were the caresses he granted them, though much more heartily than usual. Quickly he threw off his disguise and armed himself with royal splendor.

His blond head was covered by a gold helmet, from which a dragon with wide-open maw and shining eyes of carbuncle stones as ornaments droned down. From the mighty humped shield shone the same frightening image. A purple cloak surrounded his shoulders.

Thus he stepped before Gisalhild.

She raised her shining child's eye, and glowing purple flowed over her cheeks, because she saw the youthful Erchantaug. But this one look had announced to her that he loved her and that also her heart beat in love towards him.

"Royal maiden!" said Erchantaug, kneeling, "mirror image of Freya! Wilt thou hear me, who myself speak my own free words? Wilt thou grant the wish of Wuotan, my royal ancestor, wilt thou fulfill the wish of Erchantaug, my father, who wants to consecrate me and thee as husband in Freya's hall, me, Austrorand, his son, and you, Gisalhild, the lovely child of Gambin, king of the Quades? Will you give me heart and hand in eternal union, give me a life full of the purest bliss above on earth, after my mission is accomplished? Will You become my jewel and reign as queen over a happy, unleashed people, or will Your "No" condemn me to eternal night here in the bosom of the dark earth? Will you do the work of redemption, break the spell that imprisons me here in the sunken castle?"

Astonished, confused, distressed and yet again blessed, Gisalhild looked down at the kneeling man. Then she rose, her lovely little face reddened deeply, her bosom heaved impetuously and, lowering her clear, pure eye into his, she bent over him. She urged him, and in a heartfelt embrace, more eloquently than with words, confessed her love.

Now Erchantaug rose. With a soulful look he put the engagement ring on her finger and spoke the words: "My sweet girl! Receive Lofna's ring in this holy hour. Keep it faithfully! Rarely will it be granted to me to behold you, dear one, rarely may I return to this body from which a mighty spell bans me until the German on this soil again unleashes the plow over the soil fertilized by Roman blood, until this plow rides the wounded earth where now Carnuntum, sinking in vices, stretches luxuriantly. But my spirit will surround itself in a thousand forms, until the work of redemption is done, the spell is broken and you have become my beautiful, my good, my dear queen. Even now adorn the bride of Erchantaug's son Austrorand the queen's crown, entwine her with purple!"

With that Erchantaug, who in his rejuvenation called himself Austrorand, the "Shield of Osterland," rose and placed a rich crown on the lovely girl's head, whereupon he folded his own purple around her beautiful shoulders.

Once again he bent his knee before the royally adorned girl and then embraced her in a heartfelt kiss.

For a long time they stood silently next to each other in blissful entanglement. At last he tore himself from her arms and spoke in a subdued voice: "My sweet love! My time is up, I must leave you now. Today Erchantaug, my father, will lead you to King Gambin's stronghold. Is your love strong enough to stand the test, to bear the separation? I will often see you, but I am invisible to you. When you see my father, remember me fondly, call out to him a heartfelt greeting for me, as he will always find words of greeting for you, which I whisper to him in agonizingly sweet longing for you! The evil, evil Sjöfna already begins to torment me. May you remain kind and good to me! You, my life, my hope for the future!"

Tenderly Gisalhild nestled to Austrorand, and their lips found too long lasting an intimate kiss, then Gisalhild said, opening her soulful eye full to him with mild shine:

"Today already shall I leave thee, my bridegroom!? Scarcely found, perhaps have lost thee forever? Take away the crown, the mantle, give me the most meager skins, only leave me with you! Here I am happy; every ray of light from the individual candles, every fold of the hangings will reflect Your image; here I am at home, with myself! The bower in Stilifrida, the castle, has become a stranger to me, a stranger to both my father and mother. There and not here the longing, the homesickness will torment me! Who you are, I do not know and do not want to know! You say that you are a man of flesh and blood like me and the others, and that I can free you, my Austrorand, from the

tormenting spell! How gladly I do it; name the condition that redeems you, I will vow to fulfill it faithfully! But if you can turn it around, leave me here! Erchantaug, your noble, divine father, who so divinely protected me, how you remind me of him, and even if seeing you is forbidden to me, the sight of him comforts and strengthens me, and probably also many words of greeting! So leave me here, my beloved!" With a pleading gesture she threw herself against his breast, and for a long time they held each other in mute pain; at last Austrorand broke the silence. "It is impossible!" he said with a sad heart. "The verdict of the forces of fate is irrevocable for gods and men! We must surrender to it! If you remain faithful to me in every trial, then hope for a speedy reunion and a happily united life! But now prepare yourself for a hard ride. One more kiss, my dearest on earth and in heaven, and then farewell for a long, long time!"

A heartfelt kiss united the two lovers in a last stormy embrace. At last Austrorand broke away, hurried to the curtains of the exit, which he slowly lifted and sent another look of farewell to his blushing bride. It was a look in which he put all his soul, all the sorrow and pain of separation, but also all his adoring love, all his hope, a look full of sorrow and bliss. A heavy sigh lifted his chest, slowly the carpet lowered, his figure escaping Gisalhild's gaze, and sobbing, she sank back into the pillows.

Erchantaug returned to his hall. He was serious about trapping Aristipp. He wanted to starve him for several days to tame him, then add the broken man to his band of servants. Now, however, love had made him more lenient.

Having reached his chamber, Austrorand, after a moment's reflection, changed back into the gray Erchantaug, took the lamp from the light niche and hurried to Aristipp's dungeon.

Nevertheless, he decided to give himself the appearance of toughness. Even if he lessened for his prisoner the torments intended, the latter should be deceived and think that he had felt them.

Therefore he called down through the rumbling opened trap door:

"Haio, my guest! Are you finally tame? Four days have passed. I have been here every day, but you, the furious one, have given no answer. Let me ask you, whether you slept well and whether you feel desire for food and drink? Haio, give your answer, or I come only tomorrow."

Down below there is a rustling in the straw. A muffled voice whimpers up: "Let me live, you terrible one! The long hunger has already half killed me. Give me only to eat and to drink! Beat me like a dog, torture me like a mule, but let me live!"

"See, lad, what wonders such several days of fasting do!" cried Erchantaug, laughing; then he continued, "I will be a good lord to thee, and thou shalt fare better than thou oughtest, better than above the earth."

"Give me food!" moaned from the depths.

"First, swear an oath of truce to me!" cried Erchantaug coldly. "Swear! Not to dare revenge, not to flee, not to betray, not to refuse service whenever and against whomever! By a thousandfold death, shalt thou swear this! Swear!"

"I swear it," it wailed from the depths. "I swear it to thee Erchantaug, Wuotan, Hephestus, El Shaddai, or whatever else they call thee spectre of the deep! I swear it, I swear it - but give me to eat!"

Then Erchantaug threw him a rope with a crossbar dangling from it. To this he called out the words: "I am satisfied. Sit astride the crossbar and hold on tight. Do it wisely, my lad, I won't throw it to you a second time."

Soon the prisoner was hauled up, whereupon Erchantaug closed the trapdoor with a roar that echoed through the corridors and Aristipp fell down in fright. Erchantaug now extinguished the light. Then he forced his prisoner to stand up and spun him around several times to confuse him about the direction, whereupon he grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and pushed him in front of him.

Thus groping in darkness, they had reached that chamber into which Erchantaug had thrown Aistmuth's bundle.

With stone and steel and sulfur thread, Erchantaug here again lit his lamp.

"Unclothe yourself!" Erchantaug commanded the staggering man.

"Mercy, mercy!" whimpered the despairing one.

"Lay aside thy garment, as thou dost strip man. Thou hast been the philosopher Aristipp and the spy of the Aedile. Naked you came to the world, naked you enter the kingdom of the underworld. Obey!" was Erchantaug's cold retort.

Lamenting, the trembling man took off his robe, constantly pleading for mercy and protection of his life. Then the inexorable man forced him to tie it in a bundle. Now Erchantaug gave him a tablet of birch bark and a stylus and ordered him to carve the following words on it: "Before Aristippus the cowardly scout of the Aedile, henceforth Haso the Quarx."

The bundle was placed with the others.

Erchantaug now gave the lamenting man a pair of red leg warmers, brown leather shoes, then a gray woolen tunic with a hood and ordered him to dress in it. When he had complied with the order, Erchantaug handed him the belt and said "With this leather belt you bind yourself to the underworld; from now on you are no longer a man, but a Quarx, (1) you are a slave to me with body and life, neck, head and hand, skin and hair, with stick and stone, grass and grit! Your life is mine. As long as you obey the oath, it is frozen, the slightest mistake and you die a thousandfold death. Follow me, Haso!"

They left the chamber and passed through many twists and turns of the corridors. An acrid smell of stables made itself felt. After a bend in the

1. **Quarx**: Dwarf

corridor, they entered a wide hall where more than twenty white horses were stabled.

An old man dressed similarly to Haso approached those who entered. He bowed his knee to Erchantaug and said: "Greetings, my god and king! If you want the horses, they are ready!"

Well, my good Inwalt, my faithful steward and housemaster!" replied Erchantaug kindly. "I need the horses, eleven of them are ready in the great cathedral, where the river roars through it, an hour before midnight. Here I bring you Haso, a new servant, he has forfeited life, for me he is dead. You can kill him if he refuses to obey; but if he is willing and active, then treat him well, give him food and drink, also other needs. Is everything else ready as I have ordered? My soldiers fed and their courage awakened? Are they ready for the night's ride?"

"All taken care of, my divine lord and king!" replied Inwalt, the housemaster. And turning to Haso, the former Aristipp, he continued: "Now come here, you son of the hare, and say what you can do, what you can be used for. I think you won't be able to do much sensible; your name recommends you little. Well, we shall see. First you shall eat the bread of your lord, the divine king, and drink the entrance wine, then you shall try to muck out the stable, soon you shall be able to do it; then you shall groom and water the horses, pour out the oats, and ride to the watering place, and other things.

Without waiting for Haso's word, he took him by the ear and led him by it out of the stable into a chamber, where he gave him another cheek swipe and threw a hemp noose around his neck. After this takeover ceremony, which symbolically indicated the subordination of the bonded servant to his bailiff, he led him to other servants who, dressed like him with the rope around their necks, sat around a table and ordered him to partake of their meal. This consisted of broth meat with an addition of vegetables, black bread, butter, cheese, and a capable jug of mead.

"Thou seest," said Inwalt, "the fare is good and plentiful; try to earn it! All you who sit here are equal to this, none more, none less than he; teach him our custom and keep peace!"

With that Haso was admitted to the number of Erchantaug's serfs in all form by the latter's reeve and marshal.

Erchantaug strode out to the stable, toward his chamber. There, he dressed himself with the robe that he wore when he appeared to the healers. Followed by the dogs and ravens, he went into the great hall.

But he could not deny himself to escort Gisalhild to the hall today; therefore he entered her living room. He lifted the curtain and walked rattling forward to the center of the hall, but the curtains of the alcove were drawn. Therefore he called: "Gisalhild, my ward, wake up from your dream! Erchantaug will escort you to a dinner, and then a night ride to the stronghold of Gambin, your royal father. Austrorand sends you greetings and a chivalrous

kiss!"

Now the veiling carpet flew back. Gisalhild slipped out of the alcove; she wore crown and purple mantle together with the royal jewels. Her eyes were reddened by the tears that had flowed incessantly since she left Austrorand. She bent one knee before Erchantaug, raised her arms imploringly as if in prayer, and with a voice choked with tears she broke out into the words: "My merciful Wuotan, dear Erchantaug, doubly dear to me as my savior and Austrorand's sire; You omnipotent one turn the spell that forces me to leave this sheltering hall. Let me here accomplish the redemption which Austrorand desires of me! Let it be done, O Father of gods and men, Thy will is law to which the universe bows, therefore change the decree, Thou Rune-Decipherer!"

Gently the aged Erchantaug raised the weeping girl and spoke with fatherly mildness: "My good Gisalhild! Submit thyself to the counsel of fate, to which, after all, the gods themselves are subject! The lot is cast, your fate is determined in runes, you must fulfill it, I cannot turn it! Be steadfast like Freya, who was deprived of her husband, and wait like Svipdag! Remember the song:

Schwingtag, the son of Sonnbert comes
On wind-blown paths;
With all the arts no one can change
On the word of the Earth!"

With shining eyes Gisalhild now rose and called with a joyful voice:

"Thanks to thee, my divine ancestor, for the runic consolation! Well do I know the song and also the other! Gerda and Fraya are golden friends! And does not Gerda sing:

Blossom grove is, as we both know.
A windless forest,
After nine nights to the northson Gerda wants
To become a wife there.

Yes, you shall see me strong! Thy divine word and Austrorand's ring oath give me strength to defy every fate!"

She stood there proudly erect, the one who had been bowed in tears before, so that it was not easy for Erchantaug to assert his dignity and not to sink at her feet in homage. He had to collect himself. Then he said with high seriousness: "You have royally conquered your pain, you have passed the first test. He who wears crowns and mints kings, learns to renounce and control himself and leave the lamenting and weeping to the serving maidens. Then you will be worthy of the noble crown!"----------

The great hall of the subterranean castle was a spacious circular hall, whose blue shining dome vault was supported by twelve columns and provided with a similar circuit behind them as the square hall of Gisalhild. A horseshoe-shaped table was set, surrounded by twelve throne-like chairs, the middle one of which showed itself to be the high seat. Rich carpets covered the floor, purple fabrics hung around columns and walls, purple cushions covered the pews. Eleven many-carat chandeliers, placed between the columns, illuminated the room, while from the ceiling hung a mighty chandelier as the twelfth, as if it were appointed to rule the other eleven.

Erchantaug and Gisalhild entered the hall. The eleven knights present - including Aistmuth - silently bent the knee.

The meal passed wordlessly. Erchantaug, or Herian as he was addressed by his followers, had only eyes and words for Gisalhild today and forgot everything else. Otherwise it went cheerfully at the table, singing and friendly conversation spiced the meal. But since no one in the bold carriage was allowed to speak first without being called upon to do so by a question or a hint, it remained quiet in the hall today. Yes, what had never happened before, happened today. Erchantaug completely forgot about Gisalhild, who sat on his lap, ate from his bowl and drank from his horn, even though the ravens had already called out their "Wuotan calls murmuring council" several times with a highly amused shake of the head. Raven and Räbin had then plucked him by the beard, but when that didn't help either, they had hopped onto the table and taken their share from the bowls themselves without being asked. Geri and Freki, the two dogs, began to get impatient as well. First they put their mighty heads on their master's lap or arm, then one paw followed the other, finally they nudged him in the side with their snouts or put them on the edge of the table snuffling and growling. But all in vain; their master was howling for them not to stay down. Then the warriors took pity on the impatient animals and prevented them from making use of the law of self-help, which they did not seem to feel like doing.

Suddenly a mighty bugle call boomed into the hall, which, like thunder rolling through the vault, called Erchantaug out of his half-awake dreams. He jumped up, having carefully lowered Gisa onto the cushions of the throne. Raising the drinking horn he shouted over the assembled people: "My warriors and heroes! Today we hold an exodus of the Twelve! Wotan's army shall march through the lands announcing war, we shall cross the holy river to Stilifrida, the girded one! On, Wotan's army is racing!"

With a loud haiö the silent speakers jumped from their silks, the swords flew from their scabbards, and loudly the jubilant shouts of the Einherjar resounded through the hall: "Haiö, hoiho! On to the campaign with Wotan's army!"

Erchantaug commanded silence. Inwalt placed before each a mighty goblet of scarlet wine. Erchantaug rose solemnly and drew his sword. The others did

the same in solemnity, it was necessary to renew the ring oath at Bragi's cup. Each placed his left hand on the rim of the cup, while the right crossed the sword under the chandelier with the other swords in such a way that all twelve blades formed a sword-light shimmering star.

With solemn earnestness, Erchantaug chanted and recited each of the oaths, and the eleven then spoke and chanted one staff at a time:

"By earth and water and fire and air,
By gods and spirits and Hel's tomb,
By shimmering sword, so enchantingly heavy,
By Gungner, Wulvater's, the Governing Spear,
By the hatred of Frö and by fearful imprisonment,
By Loki's primal penance, which creates covenant breach,
By the force of Zähmezweig's violence,
By springwort, mandrake from ghostly forest,
At most hideous meal with shimmering serpent,
At the howling of the dogs as sweet singing,
By nightmares and oppressive gloom,
By the gods' fury and sword-metal rage,
We swear the heaviest, the sword-proud oath,
To follow the leader on the most perilous track,
We swear the ring oath in murmuring council,
Upon the most glorious head, - on to the deed!"

Now all the horns were emptied, and the knees bent with upraised swords, the head lowered and left hand resting on the heart.

Erchantaug drew his horn from the side and returned the call of the army horn from before, so that it resounded through the halls. Then whinnying from outside and echoing hoofbeats became audible, and Sleipnir, the white horse, trotted into the hall. He strode forward to the center of the hall, there he bent his knees and bowed his head to the ground.

Erchantaug strode to the stallion, loved him, whereupon he rose and stood still. He now lifted Gisalhild like a child on his arms and swung himself, in full armor and weapons with shield and spear and tightly bound helmet freely from the ground without help on the horse's back, whereupon he shouted: "Haiö, after me the aerial army rides!"

Once again his army horn boomed, his white horse neighed, the white dogs howled and the white ravens buzzed around his winged helmet with cawing.

So he rode, Gisalhild in his arms, out of the hall, and the other eleven followed him on foot through the corridors.

At last the corridor led into a wide cave of high dome-like vaulting. This

cave, covered with adventurous stalactites, was cut through by a deep crevice, from which the roar of subterranean waters roared up in an eerily muffled manner, and a light mist rose from it.

Here stood eleven white horses, upon which Erchantaug's speeches now swung. Erchantaug grasped his horn and a long-drawn call from it shook the air as if thunder were rolling through the solid rock.

There a bridge seems to grow out of the ground, slowly it pushes itself against the steep edge of the cleft on the other side, trembled quietly, -now it stands firm.

Erchantaug lets his white horse feel the pressure of his thighs; like a winged horse in gentle swing, it sets over the bridge, which thunderously announces its hoofbeat. The other horses follow. A thousand thunders wake up behind the crags, as if the rock were bursting, as if the many spear-length stalactite cones were crashing down to the roaring depths. The roar fades away, the bridge to the depth trembles silently.

The train rides silently through the cave. Finally, fresh resin smoke and clear forest noise announce that the cave gate has been reached. Now, for the first time in a long time, the sky arches over Gisalhild's lovely head. Almost greedily she breathes the spicy air and hardly notices how leaden the drops mixed with hailstones patter through the leafy canopy, how the forest moans and groans as it bends to the storm. Glaring lightning flashes through the shredded clouds, storming through the endless space.

Through forest thickets and wooded solitudes the cavalcade has laboriously wended its way and at last reached the commercial road, having deliberately made detours to deceive any daring scouts. At last the Quadrivium Sylvanium is reached with loud hello and hoiho, with loud sound of horns and crack of whips, rattle of weapons and howling of dogs, in a whizzing gallop. Thunder rolls, lightning hisses, the storm rages, and rain and hail pelts down between the rushing streams of water that tear up the road here and there. Unconcernedly, however, Wotan's army chases through the thunderstorm flood. Now the wild army reaches the Cimeterium of Carnunt and chases ghosts between the ghostly pale tombstones. Then a terrible lightning flashes and turns the night for a short moment into the brightness of noon. -

The soldier on the tower had called out at the same moment, pale with horror: "May Zeus and the Capitoline gods protect us, the genius loci is too weak against these."

Chapter Six
An Eerie Ride

Midday sunshine brooded over Carnunt. Through the large cast-glass panes of three windows of the Hibernum Castrum, the August sun sent its thirst-generating rays into a magnificent tavern. Marcellianus had gathered a select company to hold a symposium according to the strict laws of the Greek table.

To hold such a "Graeco more bibere" (1) in the heat of summer was a most laudable beginning, because it is quite pleasant to drink when the heat of the sun parches the throat.

"Well, then, let us hold school according to the gracious command of Caesar Valentinian!"

This is what the arbiter convivii Marcellianus shouted from the center seat of the lectus, happily swinging a tankard. Having done a master drink, he continued:

"High treason, if not more trouble, it would be, if I wanted to change and interpret the emperor's word. Is it not the duty of the soldier to obey without fail? By Zeus! Caesar's order is to be obeyed to the letter. He ordered me to go to school. Nothing more, nothing less! Blindly obeying the Emperor's word, I went to school. My illustrious father appointed you, gentlemen, as my teachers. Let the school begin! Evoe!"

With that he raised the tankard, which a second master draught emptied.

The goblets sounded in the bump. Loud laughter and cheerful evoes

1. The "Graeco more bibere" corresponds to our common student drinking groups of today. Mighty jugs of wine were emptied there, with all the usual pre-drinking and post-drinking as today. Also from the left corner place to the right one let a full tankard "rise" - "a sumnio bibere" - and so went also the round chant. The chosen prefect was called "Rex" or "Arbiter convivii" 11.

indicated that Marcellianus was by no means misunderstood.

Only the worthy favorite of three Caesars, the veteran Petronius, had not understood him. Infinitely dignified, he cleared his throat, made an encouraging gesture and spoke: "Well, my Prince, I understand your fears. But the Emperor's command is not to be taken literally, nor has it been taken so. It is not as your teacher but as your advisers that I and the others present have appeared. Who would dare to consider you illustrious prince as his pupil, who would want-----"

The pompous darling of three deified emperors could not speak further, for bright laughter interrupted him. A higher red on his face showed how much he was annoyed to have been deprived of his beautiful speech in such a crude way. Displeased, he buried his face in the enormous round of the mug.

Out of the fading laughter, however, still shrilled the bright little voice of the friendly Phanius, who now cried out, laughing: "Hihihi, my noble friend Petronius has pathetically misunderstood you, my unattainable patron and benefactor! Allow me to laugh at him for it! Ha, ha, ha -

And with laughter the jocular old man shook himself so that tears ran down his furrowed cheeks.

Petronius could not speak a word from astonishment and anger, so he drank all the more. But he sent a grateful glance over to Licinius. The latter had just slowly sipped the fiery Falernian with sweet pleasure and deep understanding, but after Phanius' speech he thoughtfully put it down and said: "He is not so pathetically wrong, my friend and brother Petronius. However, quite a few of those present here are attached to our exalted Arbiter convivii as advisors. But whether you, Phanius, are also among them, I would like to have asked!"

"What a question in the mouth of the Omniscient!" exclaimed with comic earnestness Caudusinus, one of the two Curule-Aediles (1) of Carnuntum. Should it not be known to you that he is the house-cupido of our princely host? - Not? Nor why? Shame on you!"

"Evoe! tell, Curule-Aedil!" cried Marcellianus cheerfully, raising the cup, "so you please me and your school!"

The Curule-Aedil did a refreshing drink, as is good to keep the tongue supple to long speech, then he began: "It is known to you, O Rex, that a few days ago the emperor had assembled the great council because of the legation to the Quadian king. The atrium of this palace was almost too narrow to contain the bearers of the imperial wisdom piled up here in Carnuntum. Each of them, fully aware of his value, walked up and down under the colonnades, and it was indescribably droll to see them behaving as if they were the most

1. Honorary offices to supervise and organize public shows. The Aedil, on the other hand, exercised the police power. He was therefore, however, omniscient.

important after the emperor. It is true that none of them was asked for anything, since the consuls and councilors were already in the throne room, and they therefore seemed to me of equal importance as the extras of my theater. The constant contact with comedians and tragedians may be the cause that the gears of the world seem to me like a theater with sometimes tragic, sometimes comic scenes, and it is certainly not my fault - by the Momus! - if I almost always see only comedy playing."

Candusinus drew a breath, raised his tankard to his mouth, and winked mischievously at Phanius, who acted as if he had not been spoken of. The Curule-Aedil continued:

"Leaning against a pillar, I watched the hustle and bustle that amused me and applauded the unconscious comedians in my thoughts when they acted so jocularly in their imaginary dignity. Then my gaze fell on one of the best of the good, on our excellent Phanius."

Once again Candusinus interrupted himself to have his tankard refilled. At the same time, the too-full goblet drenched his hand, which he dried on the long curls of one of the waiting boys. Then he resumed his story: "I immediately approached our friend Phanius and learned from the happy man that little Sabina has granted him a rendezvous for the evening. So in the evening, I thought, and went. Of course, I was there on time as an uninvited and unseen spectator. Deep darkness shrouded the atrium. Rain and hail pelted through the compluvium, and at times a glare of lightning penetrated. Just as the rule of comedy dictates, our friend Phanius appeared as a languishing lover, sighing and acting as if he were his own great-grandson. As comedy dictates, a white-veiled female figure came floating from the other side and called in a whisper for Phanius, whom she could not see because of the great darkness. Out of joy, the happy man leapt from the protective roof and out under the compluvium, where his gracefully folded toga soaked up the rain like the cracked bark of a half-dried oak. This, however, did not stop the love-thirsty man from embracing, kissing and kissing again the cloaked female figure before she could say anything more. The scene was divinely beautiful! Suddenly several slaves come from different sides with lanterns, and dazzling light pours over the lovers; then Phanius utters a half-loud cry of indignation or pain, takes a step backwards and falls into the impluvium, from which, however, he is soon brought up wriggling, screaming and dripping. Think, friends, his misfortune! Sabinchen, employed by her mistress, was prevented from coming to the rendezvous, and had therefore sent the old Cordula to report this to him. Phanius, however, did not let her carry out her order and discovered his mistake only when it was too late the fright plunged him into

Compluvium & Impluvium: Rainwater catchment systems in Roman courtyards. The compluvium was a slanted roof that directed water into the impluvium, basically a pond or a well which could be covered or uncovered. The system gathered rainwater, filtered it for drinking, and was paired with windows to generate a cooling breeze in the house.

impluvium, which probably cooled his divine ardor of love a little for this time, but certainly did not extinguish it forever. Thus concluded this comedy. Say now, friends, has not our friendly Phanius brilliantly earned the dignity of house cupid of our Prince and glorious host!"

Resounding laughter filled the room.

The friendly Phanius, however, distorted his face, as if the sweet Falernian had suddenly turned to vinegar on his tongue.

The mugs circled again, they rose from the left corner of the drinking table, and many a happy wine song was sung. One of them drank first and the others followed in the prescribed order. In between, this and that funny adventure was told and everything was talked about, but not about making camps, building bridges, or other things that might have contributed to the concept of a school.

The dampening solution had probably been applied too vigorously and had washed away the paint instead of binding it.

"But was that a stormy night!" interjected Marinius, prefect of the fourteenth legion, in a harsh bass voice, when there had been a brief pause in the din of the revelers. "By Bromius! As yet I know only the official report. The wildest gossip runs through the Fourteenth, so that one would almost think that good Publius Ovidius Naso was not lying when he wrote the Metamorphoses. By the eagle of my legion, I almost believe it myself now! What an overcast night! Evoe!"

A new huge wine jug of wrought silver was hoisted on a tripod of daintiest brass casting, drinking horns of carved elephant teeth with gold rim and a lining of like metal passed around the boys, whereupon Rex Marcellianus cried, "Silentium, Commilitones! Licinius, speak!" "Evoe, Licinius!" chorused. "I am but a man, like other men," began Licinius, "but because fortune calls me to be aedilate, superhuman things are required of me. Marinius, the legion prefect, has already admitted that it must be gods, or at least demons, who cause those seemingly inexplicable incidents. None of them is in contradiction with the descriptions of similar events, of which our grandfathers of long ago handed down fairy tales. Not today, not yesterday, not weeks ago, years ago or centuries ago this spooky activity has begun, it lasts as long as there are and will be gods and men. It is only a matter of fashion if this spook now causes a sensation and is discussed, as in the very near future the same fashion will demand it again that one smiles at such processes incredulously. Then all who believe in it today will deny just as vehemently the possibility of the spooky activity. All eye-witnesses, who are truth-apostles to them today, will be then fallen as dreamy fools to ridicule."

The aedile paused.

His listeners were puzzled, but not satisfied.

The feast was forgotten. Like the devout congregation of an auguratory,

all lay in the cushions as if awaiting the pontiff's oracular proclamation. None was able to resist the pressure of a frightening feeling and to speak the redeeming word, powerful enough to destroy this spell. The sly Licinius smiled; he had created the right mood for his reports. He remained silent.

Then the worthy Petronius blurted out:

"By the mysterious Mithras! Our friend Licinius has hit it right! I know that the cloak-bearer is a god, but I also know that you will laugh at me once again as a dreamer, as you believe me today, when I say that I saw and spoke to him myself."

The spell was broken. Marcellianus took the floor: "Friend Licinius!" he spoke, "you have done your task badly, and therefore I condemn you to empty your horn at a draught, and then to tell us of this spook! We want to know this one, the more cruel, the better! Your philosophers can talk to my father in the council, there they are in their place, not here!"

The Aedile did as he was told, and after his horn was filled anew before him, he began: "Your wish, my Rex and patron, is my command! So listen, you friends! You have heard about the night ride of the ghostly army, also how the Liburna was kidnapped. The guards were hidden, the Liburnians on board were overpowered! They were thrown into the water and only one managed to save himself. His report sounds gruesome enough! On that stormy night, which also became so fateful for me, my Phanius, the Liburnian lay moored in the harbor, which was well guarded. One Liburnian was standing at the mooring post, four in the Liburna itself, and a pack of ten men was guarding the other posts. Then the train approached. The man at the peg stood like a statue, petrified, paralyzed; he could not call out, could not move. The ghosts dismounted from the steeds, mounted the Liburna on their horses, pulled up the rope, - the sentry stood without movement, as if they didn't care about what was happening, and pushed off from the land. The Liburnians on board, who witnessed the whole spectacle without being able to lift a finger, were thrown overboard like logs without resistance and drowned except for one! The patrol column looks likewise paralyzed at the procedure and can stir only after the robbed Liburna disappeared! If they had been just robbers, regular human beings, the stream would have surely swallowed them up! But all this is known to you! I sent scouts; none returned, but they found their clothes!"

"What do you mean? They found them murdered?" sounded in the circle.

"By no means, your friends! They were not murdered, they were transformed! Perhaps you knew the philosopher Aristippus? He was a Hebrew, and the son of Mardochay, who was a slave trader in the Forum. A debauched man who, when his father disowned him, disguised himself as a philosopher and profited richly from the frauds he perpetrated as such; nevertheless, he always remained poor because he did not know how to economize. He was useful to me as a scout, because if he starved for a few days, I could use him

for anything. When Martinus received the rich gift of gold from the ghost as spending money, I sent Aristippus after him to find out what he was up to, and neither of them returned to Carnuntum! - Think now, my friends! Martinus was seen in the retinue of the wild hunter in rich armor, and Aristippus was turned into a tree. Yes, into a tree! Think! In the direction of the ridge, after sunset, near equinox, there is a swamp, and there soldiers heard a miserable groaning and moaning; they thought a man had died and wanted to bring him help. For a long time they noticed nothing. Then they saw a gnarled alder of human-like shape, which had put on a torn dirty tunic of gray wool and a brown coat, like a human being. Its branches had grown into the sleeves in such a way that the soldiers had to leave their clothes hanging on the tree, indeed they ran away in horror and fright when the tree now even began to speak and they clearly heard the words: "Tell the Aedile that I was his faithful Aristippus, my zeal has brought me to ruin! Men shall never follow the footsteps of the gods sacrilegiously!" The tree is said to have spoken many other things, but the soldiers were overcome by fear of the supernatural, and they ran as far as they could to save themselves from the haunted swamp. Breathless, they came to me this morning to report this. I immediately went out under heavy cover, found everything as reported and wanted to have the tree cut down. But he wailed and begged for his life, and when I nevertheless had the axe applied, blood sprang from the axe blow. The clothes could not be removed. I had a pile of wood piled around the tree and wanted to destroy it by fire. It begged so imploringly, assured me of its loyalty and promised to serve me as a sentry, that I desisted from burning it. The tree seemed very pleased. He asked me to visit him often, he wanted to give me news, which would be important for me, because in the intercourse with spirits he would learn many things, which people never guess. And now, friends, is this strange-sounding incident really so strange? You, friend Marinius, read the Ovid! Tell me, did other symptoms appear here than those reported by him and others? But further, you want to hear horrors! Even if everything sounds as if drawn from our poets, consequently not at all new, so I will tell it nevertheless, because you wish it so! You surely know the three spinning fairies. These also walk here, but the people call them the three Norns and worship them with divine honors. They are ghostly and intangible, but also not new, because old people testify to have seen them in their youth, which is so far from today that none of us was born then. The mermaids of the Danube and its tributaries are also visible. So I myself interrogated a Carnunt's wistful mother, who was called to the assistance of a male Nixie for his Nix-wife in labor. It was at night. The worthy woman is fast asleep, when there is a knocking at her door and a horrible voice asks her to follow. She wants to refuse, but the terrible Nix threatens to eat her if she does not follow him, and promises ample reward for willing service. What could she do? She had to follow him. They walked through the dark streets of the city to the old fountain at the Forum

civile, which still has the bucket to draw water and is not fed by the water pipe. There the Nix forced the half-conscious woman to climb into the well with him. How she descended, she herself did not know; he picked her up like a child, she heard the water rushing and splashing, but she did not get wet. Now they went through many passages and came to a chamber where a young mermaid was waiting for their help, moaning and whimpering. The mermaid left them alone.

Soon the mermaid had given birth to a babe. She thanked the woman for her help, warned her about the mermaid and told her not to take a higher salary than the people paid her for her services, because if she took more, her husband would tear her apart. At that moment, the Nix arrived. He was pleased to see his child and invited the woman to follow him; he put wine and fish before her, also baked goods. She fortified herself and then returned to the woman in childbed. When she took leave of her, the mermaid again reminded her of the earlier warning; the woman promised to remember it. The mermaid led her to another chamber, where there were piles of gold and silver, but apart from them three bad silver coins. Arriving here, the Nix said he wanted to reward her, she should take what she wanted. Blinded by the treasures, she was about to snatch up some gold, but the mermaid's warning came to her in time, and she took the three silver denarii. "That was your luck!" said the mermaid, "now I have no power over you. If you had taken more than you deserved, I would have eaten you alive!" He then took the woman on his shoulder and in a few moments he lifted her over the parapet of the well, whereupon he disappeared. She hurried to her apartment, where she found the three silver coins transformed into three shining gold pieces. The next day I heard about it and summoned her before me. The well was immediately examined, but no side tunnel was found, as I suspected, rather its masonry proved to be completely closed and undamaged down to the bottom. And I could add to you, my honored friends, a long chain of old wives' tales, if such themes were at all suitable for our such a feast; I hope that our illustrious Arbiter convivii will refrain from retelling these tales, which you have known since childhood. For, as I said, their factuality is proven, and they have all remained the same since ancient times, like the gods themselves. But if non-eye-witnesses, who form the majority, pretend to believe in them today, they will deny the fact, as before, when the capricious fashion recommends it again, and smile at me and all eye-witnesses as dreamers. Dixi!"

Licinius took hold of the horn and took a strong draft from it. But Marcellianus began:

"Our worthy friend Licinius would have done a better job now, and would not have lost my gratitude, and certainly yours, if he hadn't heaped guilt upon guilt, if he hadn't condemned us, forgetting the duty of a jurist, before he had given us a defense, before he had appointed us a lawyer, as was his duty! Therefore I, your Rex, must put him on trial. I must call upon him either to

deny his accusation, as if we were incredulous or capricious, or to furnish proof of the truth that his hauntings really exist. I therefore urge him to lead us at once to Aristippus, who has been transformed into a tree, and only then, when we have seen and yet denied, may his accusation be valid! You, Licinius, provide sufficient cover, I will provide you all with riding horses. In an hour I will have seen the mysterious tree with my own eyes, questioned it myself, and heard its answer with my ears, so that, when we have returned to this triclinium and resumed the interrupted symposion, I may pronounce judgment on the sacrilegious Licinius. May Bromius, if guilty, show him mercy! We will be nothing but stern judges to him! Dixi!"

Without waiting for a reply, Marcellianus sent away one of the waiting boys with the necessary instructions to order the horses.

The drinking party itself received this decree of their Rex with very different feelings; while Marinius and Candusinus enthusiastically drank to him, Petronius was uneasy, and Phanius made a downright frightened face. Only Licinius behaved composedly like a man who stands before an inevitable fate and wants to let it stoically pass over him.

With well-marked surrender to a higher will, he raised his drinking horn and spoke:

"I have heard the accusation and I am unable to declare myself guiltless. Yes, I have said you will mock when fashion demands it, I have said you will ridicule the eyewitnesses as dreamers. I did not consider that I could easily make you all eyewitnesses, I did not think of offering you the conviction voluntarily. Therein lies my mistake. Our princely guest, our unsurpassable Marcellianus has found the right track with the sharp eye of an Augustus, and I want to give you the proof of the truth! I will confront you with the horror of the haunting, I will let you see with your own eyes, hear with your own ears. You yourselves shall then judge whether I am reporting the truth. How I thank you, my princely friend and patron, whom Venus may please, Lyaeos may delight and Thesauros may bless, that you show me this favor! I stand your charge, I repudiate your mercy, I ask a stern, just sentence, and Bromius will be merciful to me! Dixi!"

The horns circled anew, but an eerie pressure rested on the symposium; little was spoken. Licinius favored the eerie silence, Marcellianus brooded silently; it almost seemed as if he regretted the hastily given order, which he now could not so easily undo.

The uneasy mood that had taken hold of the company and did not seem to want to leave, finally found its desired end, when the slave brought the message that the horses were ready; a manipel of municipal soldiers together with a platoon of mounted soldiers was already waiting at the Altum Forum to serve as cover for the company. Even the timid Phanius breathed a sigh of relief when Marcellianus gave the signal to set off.

The sun had just sunk behind a ridge of Mons Cetius, shimmering in the distant fragrance, when the company rode westward along the ridge, with the outer Porta Principalis Sinistra of Carnunt's civil city behind them. Soon the riders' gaze was free to roam over meadows and fields, vineyards and gently undulating rows of hills.

Dusk had already spread its veil over the Danube valley, when Licinius ordered the procession to stop and that the pitch pans he had brought with him be lit to illuminate the road.

These were basket-like containers made of wrought iron, with an equally wrought iron plate-like protective grid underneath, so that the sparks and glowing pieces of coal that would fall out of the basket would not be dangerous to the carrier of the pan. The pans themselves were placed on poles higher than a man and were carried by pedestrians or horsemen.

Twelve such pitch pans were held by six horsemen each on both sides of the cavalcade, whereby the road was brightly illuminated. The surroundings shimmered in the magical light, which, created by the interaction of the bluish moonlight, the red torchlight and the gloomy night darkness, with its fantastic play of flitting shadows, confused the eye and heated the imagination.

The strong wine, the deliberately confusing conversations of Licinius, as well as the eerie nocturnal ride, all worked together to put the minds in unusual excitement. Licinius was already silently rejoicing, because he was convinced that the most inconspicuous encounter would be interpreted in the most adventurous sense, even if the tree that wore Aristipp's clothes would remain silent today.

To the right, the stream rushed along, occasionally visible when the tall floodplain forest thinned out, under whose whispering canopy of leaves a bird of prey now and then raised its screeching voice or a startled owl sailed staggering through the air. The moon poured its dim light over the landscape, and small veins of water that crossed the floodplain cast pale glimmers between the trunks that seemed to stretch out like threatening demons.

Now the water veins to the right became more frequent and broader, the floodplain forest faded more and more into the background, and a wide, suspiciously iridescent swamp area spread out before the eyes of the riders, overlaid by a light blanket of mist, from which dancing flames twitched eerily. A few steps in front of the riders, on the quarry bank of the swamp, an old gnarled alder stretched its branches as if in silent lament against the moon, whose blue light flowed ghostly around the branches. On the trunk and growing through the branches, the astonished ones caught sight - just as Licinius had reported - of the clothes of the missing Aristippus Dereplides.

"We are at hand," Licinius spoke to Marcellianus, causing the train to stop. "Now, my princely friend and patron, it stands with you, as you wished, to see with your own eyes, to hear with your own ears. Ask, and Aristippus will answer thee."

But Marcellianus remained silent. He repented of his presumptuousness, and what Licinius had expected came to pass: the cowardly show-off had completely lost his courage. Licinius was triumphant. He had found an opportunity to make the weakling feel his superiority and to make himself indispensable to him. As a trained courtier, however, he knew only too well that he now had to intervene helpfully to spare his patron public embarrassment; he had to save appearances and was all the more assured of his favor - not gratitude - for it. Therefore he broke the silence. Turning to Marcellianus he said: "My princely friend and patron! I know that you wish to speak to the unfortunate Aristippus yourself, but let me do it for you; he is more accustomed to my voice than to yours, and if it should be the case that the gods wish to punish our beginning as sacrilege, let me be the guilty one! If I succumb, keep me, I pray, your love even beyond the grave; eternal Roma can spare me, an old man. But your youth, my Princeps, belongs to the future of the world empire! Hail to thee, O Marcellianus!"

And without waiting for his reply, he swung himself from his steed, threw the reins to a municipal soldier, and, followed by about a dozen armed men, sprang down the ridge to stride toward the alder.

Eerie silence covered the cavalcade; not a sound was audible, only the stamping, pawing or snorting of one of the steeds interrupted the silence. The stream roared turbidly, the floodplain rushed, and the flickering of the dancing will-o'-the-wisps, like the dull glow on the sluggish marsh puddles, wandered about.

Licinius' figure and that of his guards were clearly visible in the moonlight, as they slowly approached the tree. There - they had not yet reached it - a hissing and roaring, a shaking and quaking went through the tree and, clearly audible, the words sounded over:

"Why do you disturb my rest, O Aedil? Why dost thou torment me anew, me whom speech pains, since every word I speak threatens to shatter the burl!"

Licinius stopped, and the guards accompanying him showed that they felt great inclination to take flight, as then horror seized the cavalry.

"Listen, Aristippus!" began Licinius in a loud voice, "listen, I am required to know where now dwells that dreadful one who in the blue cloak terrifies Carnuntum, and where now dwells the other one who abducted the Liburnia?"

"O my Aedile!" it resounded with mournful whining from the tree, "both are one and this one dwells everywhere! Above you and below you, on your two sides, in front of you and behind you! But return home to Carnunt, disaster threatens your train; flee, as quickly as your steeds will carry you!"

No sooner were these words spoken than the soldiers of the municipality thought to apply the warning to themselves. They began to run as fast as they could, leaving Licinius to his fate, who in turn hurried to climb the ridge and reach his steed.

When the municipal guards waiting at the ridge saw their comrades

running away, they, seized with incurable fear, did the same and ran back in frantic haste in the direction of Carnunt, filling the borders with loud cries of lamentation. The horsemen were seized by the same terror; but Maxium the Prefect braced himself and stopped their flight at least long enough for Licinius to swing himself onto the back of his horse. Now the cavalcade was speeding along the ridge. The pitch pans, which only hindered the escape, were thrown down over the cliffs, and the procession sped away into the dim twilight of the night.

Then a steed fell at the head of the fleeing cavalcade. A second, then several fell over the first in the frantic chase of the senseless flight. Soon an inextricable tangle of tumbling, flailing steeds had formed, intertwined with the bodies of the fallen horsemen, whose curses and howls of woe made the confusion even more complete. More and more the lump of human and horse bodies increased, soon it completely blocked the embankment of the path, so that horse and man fell off, while others, unable to stop their steeds from running, voluntarily jumped with them to the depths, hoping to be rescued. Still others threw their steeds around and fled, bereft of all sense, in the direction from which they thought the supposed danger was coming.

Marinius, Licinius and Candusinus alone kept their presence of mind. It was they who brought the fleeing men to a halt and rushed to the aid of the wounded. They gathered the dispersed as best they could, and were pleased that none of their friends was missing; only the friendly Phanius had been thrown from his horse. He was lucky enough to roll off the road, which did not cause him any serious damage. The Municipal horsemen got off worse. These in their heavy armor had suffered severe injuries and broken legs; also three steeds with broken legs had remained lying on the path, one lay lifeless under them.

The wounded were assisted to the best of their ability. Under the direction of the prefect Marinius they were lifted onto the backs of the recaptured horses, where they were held by comrades. Even the amusing Phanius had recovered enough to mount a horse.

But no sooner had the procession started moving again than the fear, which had only been tamed with difficulty, threatened to degenerate into a new flight of terror; for the stampeding of hurrying steeds was heard in the rear and shouts of fear: "Flee who can, the army of Wotan!"

But the prudent managed to prevent the renewed threat of confusion by determination and encouraging shouts, the more so as the battlements of the outermost fortifications were already visible in the glimmer of the moonlight.

The approaching troops, however, were scattered stragglers who, when they reached the train, were called gruffly by Licinius and brought to their senses.

No further incident hindered their return home. - Soon the portcullis of the Porta Principalis Sinistra rattled down behind the riders, whereupon those

who had ridden out so proudly barely two hours ago took their place in the Hibernum Castrum, taciturn and sullen.

Chapter Seven
Gambin the Quad King

And once again from the diamond decorated
Gates, Day drives his steed,
Over Midgard shimmers Shinehair's mane,
Which the dwarf-overlister pulls in the light chariot.
At the northern edge of the vast earth,
Under the world tree's outermost root,
The grayish giants go to rest,
Ghosts and dwarfs and black-alive stuff.
Watch Äesir awake with brightness,
North to Niflheim the night sinks,
And on his quivering, resounding bridge strides
Heimdall, the Horn Keeper, to Himmelsburg.

Kadolz, the castle keeper, had sung this song. It was not a fine sound. Primitive and rough like the roar of an alpenhorn it sounded from Stilifrida's Ringwall. As his shield office dictated, the castle keeper had greeted the "Dwarf Overlister" with a powerful song and blaring horn, which now swung up in radiant glory above the distant eastern chain of hills to begin her walk of world illumination.

Also the cocks in the homesteads of the city did the same to the warden at the castle gate and crowed their own wake-up call over the city.

The city began to stir.

Behind the picket fences of the individual homesteads it became alive. Servants came out of the houses and opened the pens, so that the cattle and sheep, the goats and pigs could go out and gather in well-separated herds on the large square of the town, under the Donar oak. There the shepherds stood

with their dogs and sounded the calls of their horns and whistles to gather those trusted to their care for the drive. The bleating of the sheep resounded between the bleating of the goats, drowned out by the bellowing of the cattle or by the barking of the dogs, and the general swaying of voices was melodically lifted by the many-toned sound of cattle bells and merry cracking of whips.

In the midst of the pole pens stood the wooden houses with their gables of delicate carving, rippled by the light cloud of smoke. The housemother, the keeper of the sacred hearth, was just kindling the smoldering coals to a bright flame to prepare the early meal.

But the gate was still closed and the flocks were waiting for their turn.

Then a warning horn call sounded from the castle gate, where Kadolz was standing guard. The first was followed by a second and soon by several more.

A sudden cry went up into the good royal town of Stilifrida.

"Feindiö, Feindiö!" rang out the call.

Screaming, their braids flying, the women rushed from the kitchens into the fenced courtyards and from these out into the narrow winding streets; they ran between the fences to the Donar oak in the square to drive their cattle home. With cries of anguish, servants and maids followed them.

The men, however, had seized their weapons and rushed to the ramparts, where Kadolz blew the warning call.

"Who is making that rooster crow such an ear-scraping welcome?" (1) the quickly gathering armed guards eagerly shouted in reply to the Castle Guard.

Then a horn call resounded from the castle. This horn was well known.

"Haiö, Hoiho, the king! Hail to the strong lord of men, hail to Gambin, the rock in the storm of battle!"

Thus it resounded in many thousands of voices from under the shields, reinforced by the booming roar of weapons.

A powerful figure, accompanied by a stately retinue of knights, climbed the rampart. It was Gambin, the Quade king, already recognizable from afar by the long flowing blond curls, interwoven with silver from approaching age, and the sorrowful being, which never left him since his daughter was stolen, recognizable by the amber-yellow lion skin, which has surrounded the shoulders of Quadish kings as ancestral heritage for many male ages, recognizable also by his red shield with the golden lion, whose glooming eye was a flashing carbuncle.

1) Hahnkrat = the crowing of the cock in the morning. It was (and still is) considered by the farmer as a wake-up call for the day's work. The rooster was a sacred animal and itself passed into the symbolism of Christianity. It still stands on the church towers as the cock of Peter, it is still a spooky, so-called pointing animal. In old legends and fairy tales it plays an outstanding role. In

old sunken castles he crows at the holy times (3 or 9 roosts deep). That's why the folk language still uses the word for its crowing in the morning, which is foreign to the city dweller: Hahnkrat. - helmschrottenden (helm-scraper) - helmezerhauenden Willkumm. The whole sentence is supposed to express the pugnacious question, who wants to get good German blows at such an early hour? The butcher is still called today: Ausschrotter, from schrotten, zerhauen, zerteilen. (scraper, hitter, chopper)

Like the king, his retinue was armed with shields and helmets. Stilifrida's men were also well armed, but most of them lacked a breastplate as well as a helmet; for at that time, in German lands, such riches were affordable only to a few.

"Receive my royal salute!" cried the king, raising shield and lance in welcome. Then he turned to Kadolz and said: "Tell me, horn-keeper, are there Roman dogs barking? Was this your wake-up call?"

"See for yourself, my Lord and Liege," was the keeper's reply. "I cannot yet tell who those on the white steeds are. Is it the king's followers? Sun-flaming, they glaze around the breast and shields, my eye has never seen a more beautiful array of bright heroes!

For a long time the king had looked out sharply at the approaching ring of riders. Now he lowered the hand that until then had shaded his eye, a tremor came over the tall figure, his knees swayed and pallor covered the face of the male ruler.

Randmar, the king's marshal, perceived this, and he laid his right hand heavily on the king's shoulder and spoke: "What makes thee tremble in battle? Never have I seen Gambin, the Quade ruler, tremble! Make it known to me, my King, what terrible thing has shaken thee?"

As if out of his mind, Gambin cried, "He, it is he himself!" "Who is it?" wanted to ask Randmar, but the Quade king had already pushed him aside and hurried along the rampart to the Red Tower of Albruna. Randmar and the knights followed.

The red tower stood on the rampart and showed neither lugholes nor entrance. It was circular and beehive-like, painted with shiny red paint and decorated with three white wagon wheels.

This Tower of the Hechsas was carefully avoided by everyone, because one could experience many things there that were better left un-experienced.

Therefore, when the old men realized that the tower was their destination, they gladly gave the king a head start and stayed more than a dozen steps behind Gambin.

Arriving in front of the Red Tower, the king sounded his horn three times with great power, and turned to it, he shouted: "Listen, all-advising high Albruna, listen! Gambin the King asks the question: Is salvation or harm coming to the King of the Quads from the south?"

Horror seized Gambin's followers. All of them threw themselves on the ground and grabbed a tuft of grass with their teeth to avoid being kidnapped by ghosts. Only Gambin stood in front of the tower waiting for the answer.

There seemed to rumble from the bowels of the earth like distant thunder and the muffled sound of an army horn. Then this droning dissolved into soft harp chords, and the harp sounds were joined by a voice that sang urgently from the depths of the grave:

"Rejoice, Lord and Liege of the Quads!
Quickly raise the gate on the towering ring wall!
Well do I know the bold ones on magnificent stallions,
I know the howling, yelping wolves,
Well do I know the courting, murmuring ravens,
I know Wuotan, Champion of the Castle!

Rejoice, King and Koting of the Quads!
Quickly raise the gate on the towering wall of the ring!
Well do I proclaim Herian's favor to the bold;
Well choose for worthy, befitting skulls
Twelve swift steeds, Wuotan to consecrate, -
Well comes the noble returning maiden!

Rejoice, Koting and king of the Quades!
Quickly ring out the gate at the towering ring wall!**

In softly fading chords the song echoed, and whispering it rustled through the nearby oak forest, like the foreboding breath of the deity.

The king stood trembling in front of the Red Tower. Bright joy blushed his face, it seemed rejuvenated, as if a drink from the fountain of youth had refreshed him.

Then loud rejoicing surrounded him. His followers, his castle men had heard the song and whispered to each other what they had heard. They now showed their participation to the king with loud shouts of joy.

The king raised his shield and lance as a sign that he wanted to speak. It was quiet.

Then Gambin called out in a loud voice: "Stilifrida, hear the thanks of your king! Prepare table and chairs in the square of the city, today you shall be the King's guests with children and bowls, man and mouse. Fifty oxen, a hundred pigs and two hundred sheep will turn on the spits or be brought to boil; my house maker shall give them to you. Beer and mead and wine from the castle cellar shall quench your thirst, and minstrels shall shorten your time. The king's fine is also waived for anyone who is staying in this castle today and who has become a slave to my treasure. Prepare the feast, thou, my post-girded

royal city!"

New jubilation surrounded the male ruler. The joy of the townspeople over the king's clemency had not yet subsided, when a noble female figure in a purple cloak, hurrying far ahead of her female retinue, rushed toward the king. Embracing him stormily and hanging on his neck, she spoke with haste, interrupted by weeping and laughing: "Our Gisa returns home! The Norns whispered it to me in the women's hall! - Rejoice with me, my beloved, - Gisa is coming home!"

Moved, both held each other for a long time. Then Gambin broke the silence: "My dear heart! The gods grant us happiness and honor again! There watch them draw, Wuotan himself brings us the child!"

Silently the royal couple looked down from the rampart over the land. The cavalcade had come closer and was clearly visible.

A mighty lord of men was riding along with his retinue of noble knights, all on white horses. He himself held in front in the saddle a maiden in the king's ornament, whose blowing gold hair seemed to play with his silver curls. Two mighty white hounds accompanied his white steed, and a pair of white ravens circled the cimier of his helmet without noise.

Slowly the train approached. The horses trotted proudly, but the warriors sat in the saddle like cast statues, like beings from another world.

With a serious look, the king looked down at the approaching procession and its rare splendor.

Closer the queen nestled to his broad breast, and a stream of warm tears rushed from her eyes, relieving the pain of joy.

"They come, already I see my child!" said the queen, smiling through her tears, "yet," she continued, "the eye of the mother sees keenly! It is no longer the child who comes to the mother's heart; she is now already a maiden! Ah, and she returns home only to part again. So Albruna the Hechsa told me today: Wuotan himself has chosen her, he wants the virgin for himself as a sacrifice! The gods envy the happiness of men and give it only to take it away again!"

And again tears fell from Gotelinden's eye. Silently Gambin pressed his consort to his heart, a deep sigh lifted his breast, then he said consolingly:

"Always failed is a woman's custom. You hardly see happiness approaching the gulf, and already swear of misfortune, instead of fervently praising benevolent gods! And if he honors them as a sacrifice for himself? Did not Eticho, the first of our lineage, honor Gerlind, my ancestor? Is such a sacrifice to be lamented? Is it not rather a happiness, if it once gives life to Kotingen, real Kotingen, real sons of the gods, not only fake ones from later generations like me? Only the joys that the gods grant us in our children are short! But they granted you the undisturbed happiness of our Gisa's childhood! - Gisa will now return home to you as your child! - Soon she will leave your quiet chamber as a wife, and surrounded by tears you will send her parting glances! -

Call it back to you then, the short, beautiful dream, when she was still only, undividedly your own, the mother's most beautiful own, and others will live from her, generations of the future she holds in her womb - but you, poor mother, have lost your child! - But weep not, my dear wife! - Carry strong in your royal heart the second, deep mother's pain, when once the hour of separation strikes! As with mild shine Freya's necklace adorns the evening sky, so memory will gild the evening of your life to you!"

Sobbing, Gotelind sank to Gambin's breast, and silently both held each other for a long time. - Then the call of the bugle sounded from the distance up to the castle hill. The sound woke Gambin from his dreams. Another heartfelt kiss united him with his wife in a short embrace.

Then he gently wriggled out of her arms and grabbed his horn to return the bugle's greeting.

Hand in hand with the queen, he left the city through the inner castle gate and descended through the narrow kennel between the double ramparts along the steep path to the outer castle gate at the foot of the castle hill. He opened the gate himself by throwing back the mighty oak bars, whereupon the gate turned on its hinges with a creaking sound. They stepped out into the open, followed by the knights and the queen's maidens. They still had to pass through the dungeon that surrounded the castle hill below. At its entrance, the freeman Strangolf was already waiting for the king and his eleven gods. All twelve were dressed in fire-colored clothes and carried twelve white horse heads speared on twelve poles.

Strangolf had consecrated twelve horses to a sacrifice at the king's command, in order to honor the approaching god worthily with bridled sacrifice (1). These twelve greeted the king and queen by bowing their knees and then preceded them through the entrance to the dungeon until they stopped a hundred and one steps in front of it.

There the king and queen stood silently, awaiting the approaching procession of the gods. The twelve horse-head bearers formed a semicircle around the royal couple, behind which the men and maidens joined in a wide arc.

The cavalry had now come up to arms length.

Then Erchantaug stopped his steed, the white dogs stood still and the ravens sat down on his armpits; but the following crowd arranged themselves in a semicircle around him, so that they completely closed the ring with the twelve main horse bearers.

The royal couple silently bent their knees and raised their arms over their bowed heads in a gesture of prayer. Serious and mild, still silent, Erchantaug looked down at the kneeling ones, and only Gisalhild sent joyfully longing looks to her parents; but she too had to tame her impatience, for the God was due his silence. Following the example of the king, also his proud knights and

the rest bowed down to the dust.

To pay homage to the Allfather, Gambin placed his shield in front of him in the dust and put his crowned helmet on it. The queen also detached her tiara from the veil and placed it next to Gambin's crowned helmet. Now the king drew his battle sword, grasped it at the tip and thus presented the weapon to the god as a sign of humble surrender.

With unmoving calmness the god sat on his horse. Now he raised his right arm as if in blessing, and in a powerful voice began to chant these staves:

"Chosen king, crown thee,
The burden of the godly koting!
Raise the shield from the dusty road
And give back the hoop to Gotlinden too.
Wuotan as Erchantaug foresaw your wishes,
He kept your Gisa, the blissful child.
Hand me your sword, the battle-sharp one,
Wuotan grants you his loyal one in exchange.
The Horses' jaws I perceive with delight,
Therefore also Victory-Father grants you Sun-Power.
A Sun-Hero he sends to the Hall of
Gambin and Gotlinden to honor Gisa:
Germania's future kings proud and powerful
I see, sprouted from the bosom of the shieldmaiden,
The maidenly flower of man blossoms
From Eticho's noble lineage of gods.
So true Gambin and Gotlind, give to me Gisa!
Herian, the army champion,
Needs for Wuotan's son Austrorand
Herian's most lovely wishing maiden!"

(1.) “Ziefer” = sacrifice (“opfer”). Still echoed in our misunderstood word: “ungeziefer”, or vermin,

which actually means a non-sacrificial animal. Similar origin has the word: Unflat, from "flat", pure; in this sense: Elsflet, even flat cake (Fladen, Kuchen, Opfergebäck).

The song died away, the spell of shy silence weighed on the motionless kneeling in the dust.

Then Gambin raised his head, and a radiant glance met the singer of the rune staves. He lowered his sword into the hanger, tied his crown helmet again and put the diadem on the queen's head. Now he raised his shield and stepped in front of Erchantaug's white steed.

Erchantaug pressed a long kiss on Gisalhild's forehead and then let her

glide gently into the arms of her father, who caught her beaming with delight and pressed her jubilantly to his heart.

Father and child held each other for a long time, the queen stood apart sobbing. Then Gisa escaped from her father's embrace and sank loudly crying on her mother's breast.----------

Erchantaug sat on his horse as if carved in stone. Now he stirred. With a few grips he had unbuckled his glittering armor and silently handed it to the king. The king did the same, and silently the sword exchange took place.

Now Gambin sank to his knees for the second time, and raising the glittering weapon of the god along with his shield, he called out:

"Give thanks, my ancestor and king of the Aesir, for this sword of the Sun! Never trembles its wielder, he holds victory in his fist! Tremble Rome before the king of the Quads!"

"Bold I thought thee, man-lord, in the delivery of the divine wound-flame!" replied Erchantaug earnestly, and continued, "With proud mettle honor the crown of all the Teutons! Too easy, it seems to me, would be for you the poor crown of only the Quadi tribe! Individually the strangling she-wolf devours you, but united you defeat the Earth, as far as my sun shows you the way! Up, go to the city, by sacrifice and magic more will show itself to you!"

The king rose and took the reins of the god's horse with his left hand to lead it to the city, while the queen took the other rein and walked by Gisalhild's side.

In front went the chief bearers of iron, and after Erchantaug's followers the men and maidens of the royal couple went to the city. In dense heaps, however, the people pressed on, kept at a proper distance by the marching lord Randmar.

Kadolz, the wall keeper, stood at the gate, as was his duty, and threw the gates into the lock with a roar, after the last one had entered the castle ring.

The procession had reached the large square of Stilifrida amid loud cheering.

Busy bustle filled the same. The king's servants were slaughtering the animals for the feast, others were already turning whole oxen on spits or stoking enormous fires under seething cauldrons. Sprightly load haulers stored the barrels full of wine and mead on the quickly carpentered gantries, or adjusted the never missing quart kettles. The royal waiters were working, knocking the draught out of the barrels and pushing in the taps, not forgetting to check that the taps were in working order. In the middle of the square, near the Donar's Oak, a fire bed had been erected, where the parts of the oxen and other animals that could be sacrificed to the merry Donar were to be burned.

The arrival of the god may have interrupted the hustle and bustle, but never the loud joy. People cheered the entering god with joyful celebration, and some drew their helmets into the four-pot to consecrate a cheerful libation to

the god.

But no sooner had the procession of gods disappeared behind the fences of the next farmsteads than the hammering and chopping sounded again in the cheerful clamor of voices, and the pushing and pulling began anew, for there was still much to be done in order to carry out the king's mission. All of Stilifrida, men and women and children, including servants and maidservants, were to receive roasts and brewed meat, bread and cakes, wine and mead and beer in abundance - that was the king's command. Then it was time to raise one's hands, and everyone did so with great pleasure. Where the king's servants were not enough, the city's fathers voluntarily gave their serfs to the marshal, so that he could use them for the day's necessities. The town elders also did their part. They sent the boys out into the forest to break young saplings, and the little girls had to fetch flowers from the meadow and the field and wind wreaths to decorate the Donar Oak and to make the dance floor peaceful.

But against the oak itself leaned an old man, next to whom stood a younger companion. They looked well armed, and yet they seemed to be neither knights of the king's retinue, nor citizens of the city. Then the old man opened his cross-bag and took from it a harp, which he sound-tested.

The train of the gods had reached Lake Harug at the northern end of the city.

It was a moderate pond, dug in an oblong quadrangle, from which two unequal islands rose. One, the "Hutberg", carried a round building, shaped like Erchantaugs' house in front of Carnuntum's gates; this round building also had two entrance doors, which were connected by a common door frame. Dense thorn hedges surrounded the island, which had no connection with the land. The second island, "Odin's Bed", was built regularly in a quadrangle and connected with the land by a narrow footbridge.

On this a mighty woodpile had been erected, there lay the sacrificial parts of the steeds, awaiting the sacrificial fire. The Odin's-bed was the fire altar of the god king.

Eleven of the sacrificial steeds had been handed over to the royal chef Astold, the twelfth, however, had been cut up and hung in individual pieces in the branches of the three sacred lime trees, which grew green at the edge of the lake. These hung pieces of meat regularly disappeared - how, nobody knew - in the course of the next night from the prepared trees.

So everything was ready when Erchantaug stopped with the king and the others in front of Lake Harug.

The twelve god-heralds now put the poles with the horse heads into the sticks of the woodpile. Then one of the two doors of the round building at the Hutberg opened, from which three virgins now stepped out and put down a spacious cauldron before the gate. It contained the blood of the sacrificial steeds.

Two virgins were dressed in white, the third in black, like the three Norns in the sunken castle at Carnuntum; only their ornaments were almost poor in comparison.

Silently they set down the cauldron and then sang over it the nine magic songs that Bölthorn, the father of Bestla, had once sung to ward off mischief.

After the cauldron had been consecrated, the three sang three times around the round building; what they sang in a triad sounded like this:

"We spin and weave the flowing fate,
Runes mighty by sacrifice and magic;
We keep the knowledge at the Well of the World,
To man by sacred power withheld."

After this song the voices dissolved into individual songs, and first sang Wolchangard the Hechsa:

"Wolchangard, Walfather's wish-maiden and hechsa,
Gives you Koting and King of the Quads,
To make thee king of kings,
Germanic kings' ancestor to foresee thee."

Again the triple chant fell in, which was then followed by the single chant of the second:

"Trudelind, the Truda and Donar's confidant,
Sends thee blessings in seeds and golden treasure!
We stretched for thee golden threads of fate
And stretched it far above the Germanic land of residence."

But thereupon, after the triad had ended once again, the black Norn sang:

"Helwiga, Hel's knowing Wala,
But northward lowers a rope cold with envy;
Never thou seest such fate, O king,
Only foreboding hope in thy heroic heart!"

Gambin had heard the evil counselor's ominous words with a pang, and a look longing for help met the old gray man whose steed he held by the reins; but the king could not read any comfort on his icy features. Already the triad of the Sisters fell in:

"We spin and weave the flowing fate,

Runes mighty by sacrifice and magic;
We keep the knowledge at the Well of the World,
To man by sacred power withheld."

During this Nornsong the Freeman with the help of his herdsman had fetched the cauldron, wading through the lake, from the Hutberg, poured it out over Odin's Bed and emptied it again before the door of the Norntower.

The king had regained his composure. He seized the torch that Strangolf had handed him, and while he strode over the footbridge to the Odin's bed, he whirled it three times around his head, whereupon he thrust it into the resinous brushwood of the pyre so that the sparks flew. Glowing and crackling, the embers passed through the winding passages of the artificially layered pyre filled with resinous brushwood, and here and there a merry flickering flame peeped out, which grew and billowed up, and soon the fiery red flamebird beat its purple plumage around the smoking Odin's Bed. Thick smoke rose like a giant column, destined to support the blue of the sky.

When the people saw this exceptionally favorable sign of the sacrificial fire, the beautiful, towering pillar of smoke, they burst into loud, many-thousand-voiced cheers, the weapons boomed, and only the presence of the divine guest prevented that Gambin would have been lifted on his shield and carried through the city in homage.

Suddenly the people fell silent. Erchantaug, who until then had been calmly holding his horse, had raised his spear.

Already the rune chant of the old grizzled man was resounding:

"Respect I command from all you noblemen,
High and low, descendants of Heimdall;
To announce the news of coming days,
Mimir's excellent drink reminds me.
From the murky Tiber the dragon approaches in flight
The joten-wraith as the world-worm rolls;
Shimmering full of scales from brazen shields,
He gives a withering stare through spikes of steel.
Already he beats the waves of the thundering Danube,
Envious of corpses and lusting for lands,
Breathing fire, like Fenrir's companions...
He greedily approaches, walking before all,
To cool his fire in North Sea floods,
As if Loki were riding on the shining trunk
Of the furious beast of the forest, to rule the world.

Therefore watch, you defiant, wall-loving Germans,
Wrap yourselves faithfully, you, Tuisto's race!

Renounce the separate clan by tribes,
Gather together by Shoulder and Shield!
Give Gambin the golden crown
As King of all the Germans: then my resentment will disappear,
And Gungnir, my Ger, will drink very much,
Swirling over Roma's robbing lineage!

A castle I see shimmering in the bosom of the earth
Radiantly rising to the sun,
Disenchanted by valiant brave deeds;
Defiantly it sits enthroned above Carnuntum's
Smoking towers brought low;
Locked already I know from the bars of the fort
The roads to the city for eternity!
Looking I proclaim future victories,
Overthrowing the shattered throne of the Caesars,
A German king mounts the steps,
And Germany rises to be mistress of the world! -"

"We spin and weave the flowing fate,
Rune-mighty by sacrifice and spell;
We preserve knowledge at the Well of the World,
To man by sacred power concealed."

This song had hardly faded away when Erchantaug jumped from his horse; all his swords followed his example, one of which took over the horse and entrusted it to the freeman.

Aistmuth, however, strode silently before Erchantaug and, kneeling, handed him a small box. It was of chased silver and many a strange image could be seen on it in rough, unfinished strokes. Two other warriors followed Aistmuth's example, one holding a shield, the other a mighty long lance.

"Lift off your helmet, hero-king!" said Erchantaug, stepping in front of Gambin; Gambin did as he was told and sank to his knees before the

Tuisto: Legendary founder of the German people. Possibly cognate to "Tyr" or "Tiw", or from the root of the word "twist", implying division in two warring sides, or again "twin". There is no scholarly consensus on the meaning of "Tuisto", originally encountered in Tacitus, and equated with the Roman god Mars.

Ger: German word for Spear.

Chased Silver: A method of "carving" on silver that doesn't actually cut away any silver, but a tiny hammer and spike push the silver to create lines and grooves. Now referred to as "hand chased sterling silver".

enigmatic. Aistmuth opened the box, and a rich royal crown sparkled out of it. Erchantaug placed it on the king's head and said:

"Wear the crown, thou king of the Germans, thou king of their kings, dukes and counts; wear the crown of the treasure gold of Harlungen as Herians Hegeling!" (1)

Gambin was incapable of any word, of any movement, so the unexpected coronation had surprised him.

Then Erchantaug handed him the immense spear studded with gold plate and golden tip, and said:

"Festooned with magic runes, this holds the power to unite you Germans! Send it with a loyal legation to all the tribal heads of the Germans, call a Reich Convention with it, let princes and peoples pay homage to you for allegiance and army command and swear an oath of allegiance to the German crown! Wear this shield with the eagle in Sun-gold! To it I bind victory, and to Rome its bearer shall follow! Crown, shield and horse go from king to king through all following times, as long as the German keeps the War Father's favor! But notice, if the king or the people are to blame, then with Allfather's favor also the gifts of desire are lost, and long years of purification are granted to the people and their kings, in order to appreciate anew the lost divine favor and the return of Crown, Spear and Victory! True Allfather's warning word, you first king of the Germans!'

Now Erchantaug raised from the ground the bewildered one. His heroes seized a shield, lifted King Gambin up on it, and Erchantaug shouted in a loud voice over the people: "Hail Gambin, the first king of the Germans, chosen and raised by Allfather's will! Hail to all the Germans who helpfully obey Herian's council of salvation!"

Skyward rose the sacrificial lion and threw up its reddish light, the tumultuously rejoicing people.

Meanwhile, in the wide ring of the large square, the people's joy had set up camp. There, too, next to the city pond, a sacrificial fire blazed merrily to the happy folk god Donar.

Under the oak stood the two minstrels, hooting and whistling, and in a whirling round dance the lads and maidens circled the oak and the crackling sacrificial fire.

Off to the side two quickly carpentered tables had been set up and covered with rich linen; one with a mighty column-carved high seat for the guest god and his men, the other with a lesser high seat for the king and his. All around, in multiple circles, the tables and chairs were arranged for the inhabitants of Stilifrida, and a few people camped in the grass, forming a

Harlungen, Herian, Hegeling: The Harlungen were two brothers mentioned in the Old Saxon poem, Widsith. Herian is another name for Odin, and the Hegelings were one of the many Germanic tribes situated in Northern Germany. What Erchantaug says here essentially is "wear this mythical golden crown as my Pan-Germanic king".

tightly closed ring around the tables.

Then the triumphal procession of the shield-bearing king rolled in from Lake Harug.

The dancing stopped, but not the cheering of the people, which lasted without interruption until all the king's guests had taken their places and the marching lord commanded silence.

Then the King Gambin received the first homage of his people.

Opened by the two minstrels, a long procession approached the king's table, led by the elders of the city.

They briefly and faithfully expressed their joy at the return of the most beautiful maiden in the land of the Quads, at Gambin's honor by the King of Victory, as well as Stilifrida's gratitude for the king's benevolence. They asked not to throw the gifts of homage under the table, however meager they were, because none of them was a wealthy lord. What they offered would be as poor as themselves, but if the Roman's skull had to be crushed, then every sword that Stilifrida's men wielded would weigh several pounds and be worth more than gold.

This touched the king, and with heartfelt words he assured the city elders of his benevolence and royal thanks.

Now the servants of the city elders led a select pair of each kind of livestock before the king.

Horns and hooves were gilded, and flowers adorned the animals. The royal house marshall took over these gifts.

Then the most distinguished of the guilds were the blacksmiths, the sacrificers of Frö. They led a magnificent gray stallion in a rich bridle, which they gave to the marshal. They were followed by the guild of linen weavers and garment cutters, the sacrificers of Perahta, with a gods' bull, leading two white goats with gold horns, each carrying a roll of cloth between the horns. One roll was a weave of shining white linen, but the second was a new fabric called Parchent in honor of the mother of the gods. This was a cloth of dull white color, but soft and woolly to the touch. The yarn was brought by Phoenician merchants who said that it grew far above the sea in the land of Egypt, where the Nile boiled and poured into the sea, and unfeathered dragons, capable of taking wing, let their eggs hatch in the sun. After these the sacrificers of Donar, the flour millers and bread bakers, brought their consecration offerings. Four of them carried a huge sun wheel of planks. Others carried enormous ciphers, symbolic of the horseshoes of Wuotan's steed, and more of the forms of the consecration pastry. Now Logi, the fire giant's sacrificers, the Potters, followed and placed an artificial clay vessel on the royal table. It represented a lion, whose tail swung in an ungainly curve to the head of the Undead and served as a handle. The throat was wide open and held a tube, and it was almost pathetic to look at, because one thought that the lion would never be

able to choke down the clay tube and would have to suffocate on it. Childish art, however, liked it that way, and the lion was considered a splendid showpiece of the king's table. The sieve makers, Donar's wife Sibia's sacrificers, brought a richly painted magic blessed sieve. No horse was to be harmed by evil magic whose oats were sifted in it. It was also good for many other things. The last were the sinister sacrificers Helias, the pond diggers. They were the guild that created the countless underground labyrinths, the sunken castles. It was a shyly shunned community, to which the deepest silence was obligatory, and chattiness imposed the heaviest atonement. Eerie legends spun around them an inextricable web of horror. They brought a fiery black stallion, as black as that of the goddess of death herself.

The tribute was finished. Then the queen waved, because now she, as a housemother, wanted to offer her homage to the god of the house fathers. A number of maids appeared with huge bowls, carrying the noblest sacrificial pastry, the doughnut.

The queen took the first bowl to offer it to her divine guest, but Wolchangard, the Hechse witch, stepped in front of her and demanded the right to serve Wuotan as his desired maiden.

The latter sternly rejected her and accepted the bowl from the kneeling queen with a friendly word.

"Gladly the guest God takes from the holy hands of the housewife, the pious antagonist of Frouwa, this tender sacrifice. In me thanks the kind Frouwa, who is wife and sister to me!"

Joyfully moved, the queen wanted to thank, but her voice failed her. Then her guest said: "Spare the word of thanks and keep the thanks by careful care of Gisa for Austrorand, the sunny Koting and king! As a pledge of my favor, take this consecration gift for himself and future generations!"

With that he took a glittering pendant, which was hidden by his white beard on his chest, and wrapped it around the neck of the kneeler. There it sparkled like Freya's Breisacher jewelry. Frau Gotelinde had regained her speech. Cheering, she jumped up and shouted joyfully: "A hundred times a hundred ring oaths the princess swears to you! Twice I have conceived Gisa and twice I have given birth!

With twofold care I shield my treasured child and wait and hope for Erchantaug's son!"

1) It is not an idle play of imagination to let the guilds appear here. Excavations in Stilifrida (Stillfried a. d. March, as known today) as well as other moments have proven their existence at that time. The bread forms still in use today go back deep into Germanic paganism. The clay vessel mentioned later was found during excavations in Stillfried.

With joyful cheering of all, the queen, drunk with joy, hurried to Gisalhild, who embraced her heartily and held her caressingly for a long time in the ecstasy of joy. With joyful proud glow the eye of the king rested on mother and child. But dispassionately, with majestic dignity, Erchantaug looked at the moved group, because a god stands sublime above the beating waves of earthly passion, just as the sun shines unflinchingly over blooming fields or burning forests.

Now the king stepped in front of the guest, who deserved the first drink. Therefore Gambin held a huge mead horn in his right hand. Eleven warriors from the king's retinue approached the guest's eleven heroes with filled horns for the same purpose.

The three healers, however, stood behind the high seat of the old gray man without daring to object.

Erchantaug took the horn from the king's hand, raised it to heaven and said: "I think it is right to keep away Bösewir's cup, O noble prince! It seems better to me to dedicate Bragi's horn to you, hero in love! Sinnreger's flood of foam from the runic rim of the hollow horn drinks faithfully to you, Roman spoiler, the father of victory!"

With that he raised the horn and drank it empty with one draught, whereupon Gambin seized his own, shaded it with his hand and spoke over it: "Divine ancestor, Eticho-Wuotan! Gambin thanks you with a harmless heart. Hear then, Herian, to the brew of Gambin, the German king's battle-hardened vow: "I will send battle runes with your Spear through the old districts and lands of the Germans; I will not tolerate Valentinian's castles on the German borders of the holy Danube, like those on the Rhine! War I will bear beyond the Danube and wrestling climb the ring wall of Rome! Spotlessly pure thy holy shield, the German crown and Siegvater's spear I will faithfully preserve for the successor king, faithfully serve thee, until thy valkyries escort me kissing into the gate of Valhalla!"

Now both drank their horns empty, and Erchantaug seemed to freeze again to icy calm. Gambin strode back to his high seat, and the feast began. From now on, the Norns stepped into their rights to serve the guesting god as steward and tavern keeper.

While bowls and tankards circled, some amusement was seen. Then twelve boys came bare of garb and danced the sword dance until all were defeated by one. Now the eleven defeated boys wove their swords together to form a rose, placed a round shield on it and thus lifted the victor into the air by the sword handles to show him to the people as the king of swords.

"You are worthy of the sword initiation," said the king, "at the next Thing I will make you of age and fit to defend yourselves!"

“Armor and Helm, Sword, Lance and Shield, I also donate to the celebration!”, the guest said calmly, to which Gambin added the promise to

unite the twelve of his followers.

This was a priceless gift, for bronze armor and helmets were still rare in the German territories. The king appreciated this very much, and therefore took care to secure the twelve for his retinue.

The people meanwhile rejoiced, and the other games began with doubled zeal. Twice, however, the sun does not rise on any day, and so also today there were only the twelve gifts. The winners in the javelin and stone throw, in the long jump and high jump, in the wrestling and running, had to be content only with the honor and put off awards until another time.

Hunger was satisfied, and the bowls removed from the tables. Instead of food, now the horns circled more and more lively, despite the fact that many a heroic drink had already been made.

"Give us a song, you sacrificers of Brage and Zeizzo, the beautiful!" the king shouted over the buzzing of the cup-tourney.

Then the minstrels stepped before the king. The old man strummed, and the boy sang this song to it:

"There was the bold Guntram,
King Gerold's son,
Who three hundred years ago
Was rewarded with high song.
I will report this true
To King Gambin's honor,
For his ancestor's booty
His shoulders still wear today.

Proudly strode from Stilifrida's
mighty royal palace
With spear and sharp sword
The bold king's scion;
On wild forest paths
He gladly performed the hunting work,
Until there, where thundering the Danube
Surrounds the banks with waves.

There the boy Guntram
Saw a furious forest animal,
A lion and a lioness*),
That lurked in the bush's spell,
And roared terribly
From the leafy forest

But he young hunter,
Does not give way to the terrible game's violence.

Hoiho! You yellow dogs,
Why do you move so wildly?
Come on! My noble iron
Easily quiets your noise! -
Why do you yellow dogs growl?
Hey? Is this spear right for you?
Also for you? Or did the blade
Perhaps in the body you, the yellow, too bad!'

Thus the heroic boy
Felled the terrible game,
The Roman scouts escaped
Frightened out of the prince's territory;
They thought with mighty magic
The lions would land and kill,
Too tame the Quads with terror,
But now cowardly they fled the eerie place.

Young Guntram, the boy king,
Happily and gaily called:
You growling yellow dogs
Will never again bark through the air!
Give me a heroes' need,
Your yellow woolly coats,
They will dress me as future king
In royal proud delicious state!'

So the king's boy came
To Stilifrida's city,
He wore the lion's yellow skin
In place of a coat,
That of the lioness lay with him, too,
As the young hunter's gain,
How flattering about his shoulders, -
How he went along so gayly, so cheerfully!

The guardians and keepers of the ramparts,
A horror was upon them,
But laughing the lion's slayer

The bold deed began to announce:
I have slain two dogs,
Viciously roaring beasts, -
They'll never bark again in the future,
I have also weaned them from biting!

Then came Gerold, the king
And Gerlind, the queen
To the laughing lionizer
To see Guntram's feat.
"Thou hast the noblest of the beasts,
My son, defeated in battle,
From now on, wear as a king's mantle
The golden robe of the king of beasts!

Bequeath to future ages,
O son, your proud coat,
Bequeath noble disposition
To manly mighty deed,
Bequeath to the Quads the glory of war,
As robed king's scion
Bequeath land and people,
Stilifrida, the city and the proud castle!'

So it happened,
As King Gerold said,
Four hundred years already
The Romans couldn't defeat
The brands of Germanic lands,
You lion-skin bearers with strength;
Thus keep on the watch,
O king Gambin, with shield and with shaft! -

And has this song succeeded me,
O king, to royal glory, fill,
So fill, O princess of nations,
To the singer of heroism
The excellent drinking horn anew
With Sinnreger's sunny foam
And grant the bold proclaimer
The after-drink from women's mouths!"

The song had died away. Bragewalt, the singer, had bowed before Frau Gotelinde. But when she had raised a full horn and told him, he bent his knee and received the horn from her hand, which the queen had sipped. Devoutly he lifted it up and put it to his mouth at the same place where Mrs. Gotelinden's lips touched it. He emptied half of the horn and gave the rest to his companion. He emptied it completely.

Roman murder and wall fire!" Mr. Randmar, the marshal, had shouted then. "Praise be to you, my little singer! No better song could you have found than the song of the Quad king's mantle!" And he drank bravely, for the wine was good and the king's cellar not always so generous as today.

"Randmar spoke well thus," said the queen. "Come to-morrow to my chamber; to thee and to the harper I will give a festal robe, and to each a mantle of purple. Upon this Gisa shall embroider each a harp with gold thread as a tribute to royal women."

"You shall not miss royal honors either, Bragewalt," the king had spoken with a gracious wave. "But more still of song is my desire! Of the deception of the Roman, of the loyalty of the German, of the flame of the helmet-scraping buzz, of spear-crack and shield-break sound your song! My waiter will give you liquid gold, but tomorrow you will receive gold cast in rings. So give us such a song from your rune-sanctified tongue!"

The king himself had now given everyone a full horn as a sign of special favor.

Then the old man grasped a stormy song, like the roar of a shield in the battle-roaring spear forest.

Bragewalt placed his emptied horn before the king and started:

"A proud city on the river
Is called Stilifrida
And inside was enthroned a king
Known by legend and song,
A king rich in victories
In treasures and people and lands,
Lord Gerwalt was the bold name,
Whom Romans found still undefeated.

The emperor Aurelius came
With a brawling, proud army,
But Gerwalt, fighting fiercely

1) In the year 170 A.D. the Romans let two lions accompanied by spells over the Danube into the country of the Quads, in order to spread terror. The Quads did not know what lions were and killed them, mistaking them for dogs.

With his armor prevailed;
So he thinks himself mighty,
That no victor may see him,
No king can equal him
In his power and honor.

So the army of the proud went
To Stilifrida's city,
There at the runestone
An old man in a poor cloth:
"Whence, full of resentful fury?
Whence, thou proud warrior?
Why not with a cheerful mind,
Conqueror of the Roman horsemen?!"

"Wilt thou, bearded beggar, be silent?!"
The king replies to the old man, -
But terribly the old one grew straight into the clouds,
Covering his head so white;
And a thundering booming threat came
Mightily from the sky:
"You dare to defy Wuotan,
So be victorless on battle-ways!"

Like surging, flowing floods
Breaking in the roaring storm
The locks started shoot water without stop
And in the grayish weather roar,
Between the flashing lightning
The Valkyries rode furiously,
The fate-creating sisters
Now deny Gerwalt the victory.

With great buzzing and hissing
Wuotan's throw rushes along,
For the spear Gungnir only bold deeds are valid:
So lost is the army and hopeless;
There shows the sign of wrath
His heroes see flashing,
Fear unleashed makes them flee
And their victories sink.

Intoxicated by victory, Aurelius
Occupies Gerwalt's city,
The princely Stilifrida
He found armyless;
Commits to build a castle
Of bricks to constrain the daring,
Sends a swift message,
"Lord be he now of the Quads".

But Gernot, the bold son of the Gerwalt,
Heeds the War-Father's whispering advice;
He pledges to Herian's Hutberg,
To Stronegg from perilous path,
With sacrifice and magic he bid
To win the wrathful god
To helping, healing work,
Gernot thinks with bold senses.

Granting finds with Wuotan
Gernot, the honored hero,
And the daring Quads win
The victory from the lords of the world;
The new victor's voice rings proudly:
Now tear down this Roman building,
We want to give you the castle,
Take it back again unveiled!'

Then Aurelius had to destroy,
And tear down his own building,
The earth carefully leveled,
That held up its towers;
The bricks he placed onto rafts,
The rubble too, so demands the penance,
And, laden with shame
Cursing went down the river.

This song is in reference to the well known Marcomannic Wars of Marcus Aurelius of about 170 A.D. The Romans did triumph over the Marcomanni and Quadis in this phase of the battle, however due to strife in other parts of the Roman Empire, these victories were not lasting. The generals were pulled away to other battles, Marcus Aurelius died, and the following emperors didn't maintain the territory that had been won. A fatal mistake, as about 200 years later this would be the very point from which the Germanic tribes would sack the Roman Empire and permanently destroy it.

But where the fortress stood,
Gernot, the king, has vowed,
Lake Harug (1) will be dug
And Wuotan there eternally praised!
This is the atonement to the Aesir
For sacred earth desecration,
Where once the site of the castle of strife,
The thanks of liberation flare up.

And so it has been kept,
What king Gernot commanded,
Two hills towering mighty,
Two great barriers to distress:
One is called Hutberg,
And Wotan's Bed the second,
From the waters of the Harug Sea
The two look into the distance,

Well above the ancient earth,
By expiated generations cultivated,
Where sacrifice is so holy,
As seldom is seen so abundantly,
Where heroes as kings defend,
Where gods themselves are guests,
Where women increase the joys
And singers sing the honors!"

1) Excavations have shown that on the northern side of the castle hill of Stillfried, within the ramparts, where the two tumults stand in the deep hollow, which once filled with water the Harugsee with the two islands, fragments of Roman masonry were found, such as debris from brick tiles. Since there is evidence of a Germanic-cultural earthwork over Roman foundations, it follows that this Roman work was probably built by Marcus Aurelius during his unfortunate Marcoman war, but was itself destroyed. The lack of any significant brick finds, which occurs everywhere else, proves that the building must have been torn down by Roman hands, which also removed the bricks. The Teutons then built the sanctuary over the remains of Roman foundations when they reconquered their destroyed city. - The battle mentioned in the song is the well-known Battle of the Quads of Marcus Aurelius in the Little Carpathians. On Aurelius Column in Rome, a votive relief is dedicated to Jupiter pluvius in her memory.

Song and harp had fallen silent. The people cheered, and already Randmar, the marching lord wanted to thunder out his "Roman Murder and Castle Fire!", when just in time, he saw how a dark cloud shadowed the king's forehead. "Bad weather is on the way," he had thought to himself and had almost disappeared completely into the hollow of his mighty drinking horn. The bystanders, too, and then the people noticed the king's unwillingness: there was silence all around and the singer Bragewalt stared affectedly into the king's wrath-sparkling eye.

The queen had noticed her husband's displeasure and, with the woman's intuition, had also recognized its cause. Therefore she rose with a mild smile and said to the startled singer: "Thank you for the brave song! Double thanks for the painting song of diminished age, as a warning call for future action! Two hundred years have passed since our Stilifrida of the Romans burned and we built the Twin Towers there! Gernot the Bold had atoned for the guilt of Gerwalt, the Proud. The Roman tore down his building himself and paid for the peace with many a ton of gold. Now, where the Twin Towers stood, the sacred tide of Lake Harug shines. Thank you, O singer, for your word of warning! Will not the Romans now again move into the land building castles? To preserve the favor of the victorious Aesir, you wanted to warn the king in a bold song, to protect his sacred head from harm. Thank you therefore, my singer! Even there, where the gods lead us to the battle, even there a word of warning is not an unworthy thing!"

With that, she seized a full horn, struck it meaningfully against the king's, then took a good draught from it and handed it to the singer, who emptied it with a grateful glance at Frau Gotelinde.

"Roman murder and Castle Fire! You are a brave fellow!" said Randmar blissfully into his drinking horn and reached around in the air for a long time until he found Bragewalt's right hand, which he then shook profusely.

The king cast a grateful glance at Gotelind. It had pained him that a famous ancestor of his lineage, because he fought without victory after a long glorious heroic career, because he lost a battle and freedom at the same time, had been reviled by the singer! Was Bragewalt there when he reviled Wuotan? Was this proven? Why did the singer, for the sake of vain adornment of his song, throw this drop of poison into Gambin's cup of joy? - He had thought of a song of enthusiasm for his soldiers differently. But it would be unworthy of the king to show resentment and pain about it; after all, he is so much closer to the gods, sublime, dignified peace befits him like these. - But Bragewalt is a sacrificer of Tyr, also the singer is close to the gods, as close as a king, yes often even closer than this! His song is a holy exhortation, and the

word of the song, like that of the salvation spells, holy and invulnerable!

This was the flight of the king's thoughts, and therefore even now he sent a look of thanks to Frau Gotelind, who smiled kindly at him. She had hurried ahead of his thoughts and had wisely saved him from embarrassment. Both understood each other also in the unspoken word of the eye.

Before the king stood a magnificent drinking horn, an ancient ancestral heirloom. It rested on two silver dragon's paws, curved backward to the tip like a scaled dragon's tail. On top, however, it was set in silver and ancient runes were engraved in it. No one knew of what kind of beast the horn was, for no such beast had ever been hunted in the German lands.

The king took this horn and went himself to the barrel, where he filled it with the tap. Then he set it down in front of the singer, dropped his right hand heavily on his shoulder and said: "This is my thanks for the song! It hurts to be reminded of ancestral guilt, but I respect the boldness of un-timid song! After the feast come to me; royally equipped you shall become, and if you are willing to stay, seat and camp shall be granted to you as to the best of the best!"

Pleased, the singer looked up at the king, but he shook his head defensively, then he spoke:

"Much beloved lord of men! A singing swan must be free, and the singer, too, for swan and singer have no songs if held by a golden chain! Never would a song be a servant to me, and soon we would only be a useless burden and a mockery to your knights. Therefore let us go! Gladly we will return to the moat of thy castle, when cheerful revelry will roar through the hall and thou, O patron, wilt sing harp-borne heroic songs! But frank and free is the manner of the singer as well as of the minstrel, without duty and without constraint!"

Many a word was spoken between the two, for Gambin did not like to misunderstand the skilled singer.

Then Erchantaug spoke calmly to the harpist: "Give me the strings to play! With astonished awe he handed the harp to the Bearded One, the Rauschebart. The wine-loving circle fell silent, expectation of something still unheard held them in motionless spell.

Then the Rauschebart began to harp.

Almost seized by horror, the minstrel was amazed; he did not know what happened to him. He did not yet know that such a powerful sound would encompass his string playing. He knew his harp so well, he had sounded it for years, he had grown gray with it in his arms, and now, what a sound; he almost resented it.

Flattering like a gentle spring wind, the Rauschebart raised his harp, followed by a mighty sound, like a thundering avalanche in the loneliness of a high valley, like the shaking words of the elemental forces of the weather storm penetrating the hearts of all, awakening them to the mighty high song:

"Once I stood at a towering runestone,
Supported by my staff,
And Victory Runes I cut with care,
They would have been of use;
There rode on a smoking steed,
Well shod and stately guarded,
The proud king Gerwalt,
Thou thought'st his power increased.

The savage in arms did suspect
Not who I was,
His shield so fierce he smote
In pride's grant;
To the patron seeming small,
When as Frohwalt I cheerfully asked:
'Why full of rancorous fury,
My prince, after you've chased the foes away?'

But Frohwalt's merry questioning
Missed the desire,
The Roman spoiler raged
From an angry breast:
Will you, bearded beggar, be silent?!
I would gladly grant you to the serfs,
If such a servant's ruin
Would make my fame greater!

In anger I grew mightily
To the clouds rage -
Hot Roman blood
Refreshed the flood,
And Gungnir, my Spear, hissed around
The sword-dulled, shield-lame multitudes,
Fled the people from defeat,
And the Romans were victorious.

Captured was Gerwalt, the insolent;
For life and sorrow,
For the king's life I'd gladly grudge.
Therefore no maiden,
Who cloud-borne dared..,
To choose the bold in battle's death,

Who, unvanquished, chained, a slave.
Failed to atone for the sacrilege.

What cares the punishing gods
The penitent's gaze?
What do the punishing gods care
The fate of the sexes?
What do the punishing gods care
The wives' and children's complaints?
What do the punishing gods care
Of the years' abrupt passing?

Once the Champions of Valhalla know
The guilt is atoned for,
Sparing revenge
We double the helping grace;
Reconciled gods repay
By kindly gifts the penance
And send heavenly blessings
To grandchildren in abundance. -

And again I stand in the runnel of time,
A shepherd with a hat,
And with branches for teeth
Felt the rage of the powers,
And gazed into the blinking distance,
Into goal-distant dawning times,
And knew the coming of fate;
And saw shining runes gliding.

Young Austrorand me forebodes.
The warrior of steel,
As prince of nations and liberator:
The hero from Valhalla,
He smites the shimmering shield-worm
With blazing red crackling fire,
Disenchanting the castle that sunk,
In the Roman-ridden land.

He drives to the princess' rock castle,
The most chivalrous maiden,
And frets for the friendly maiden

Of Wuotan immune;
He unites them with eternal oaths
A sorrowless loving life,
Young Austrorand changes his name
To Wurmbrand, given him by the people.

Unravels the runes of Runestone
By blooming blood,
With taming branches tamed
Thunderstorm rage.
Looked into flashing distances,
To aimless dawning times,
Gisa's and Austrorand's fate
In shining runes floats."

The rune-song had aroused a violent uproar of the soul; now song and harp had fallen silent.

Without movement and sound stood the king and the followers, the women and the singer; but the minstrel had almost forgotten how to breathe. Erchantaug, the Rauschenbart, sat there like a cast silver image; his gaze was lost in the heights of the sun, the harp rested on his chest and his fingers on the strings.

A higher red glowed on Gisalhild's cheeks, as if the pensive maiden were surrounded by Syna's rosy veil. On Erchantaug's venerable gray head the intimate gaze of her sea-blue child's eye hurried; yet her heart was full of joyful confidence, for she had felt that the mighty rune song was meant for her alone, for her, the bride of Austrorand, for her who had been chosen by the masters of fate to be the mother of divine kings, of happy times, for her whom the people therefore paid shy divine homage. But her heart was too pure, too full of the most blessed happiness, to succumb to the dangers of such homage, to give place to ignoble pride and conceit.

Erchantaug had felt the gaze that rested upon him, and sweet pain gripped his soul. Did he dare to let his eye meet hers, to plunge his gaze into the bottom of her child's eye? And yet he felt this look, which he could not bear even unrequited. He thought of escape in order not to succumb.

By deceptive calmness the turmoil of his mind was seen as foreboding rapture in the high seat, but helplessly his eye wandered in the endless sky blue. His resistance was broken and the hour of divorce approached. His heart trembled.

There his eye flashed joyfully, it had seen the rescue.

At his head, a mighty royal eagle was silently soaring southward.

Fixing his gaze on it, he rose from his perch with violent calm and raised

his right arm meaningfully. Then the ravens lifted themselves from his armpits, circling his head, and the white dogs howled.

But in a hollow voice he called out to the eagle, pointing: "Look at him in proud southerly flight! He is mine and yours! Mine above in sunny heights, yours at the shield of the German army king! Follow both southward in flight to Rome! On, to the roaring southern ride!"

How spiritualized was his nature. Motionless, he stood there until his steed snorted in front of him. Then he was already in the saddle and like a whirlwind he was off. Without greeting, as he rode away, his retinue followed him with booming hoofbeats, like thunder rolling to the crackle of lightning!

Before anyone at the royal table knew what had happened, Kadolz had already closed the castle gate behind the departed.

Even the king and queen had barely kept their composure enough to pay their respects to the departing guest by silently bowing their knees, and for a long time everyone felt paralyzed.

Then the minstrel gave a cry of joy. Shyly he had approached the abandoned high seat to take his harp and found two heavy gold rings lying there. But Sindolt, the treasurer, had approached him unsteadily and had called: "Stop! The gold is the king's! We are his treasurers, lift your hand away, or -" and grimly he had clenched his fist. But when the king awarded the rings to the harper and singer, the treasure guardian muttered something in his beard that no one could hear, because his tongue was a little too heavy.

The king laughed at this and wanted to say something in reply, but he was stopped by Strangolf, the freeman, who, joyfully excited, leaned over the back of the high seat, put his right hand on the king's shoulder and murmured in the king's ear: "Hail to you and your family! You must praise me how I have used the time! Twelvefold blessing of twelve gods has received Frey's holy grove! After ten moons twelve holy steeds blossom for you from Sleipnir's lineage, my king! Strangolf thinks that you will be very happy!"

"Wise are you, my freeman, and kind is the God who repaid us tenfold for the sacrifice," the king replied, but further speech was interrupted by joyful cheering that seemed to come from the ranks of the people.

A crowd of children crowded in front of the king, in front of them two boys and two girls, each of whom waved a golden horseshoe above their curly blond heads.

One of the boys shouted: "You must see this, Lord King, and also you, Lady Queen. As they rode away through the air, the golden horsemen, the golden king's steed lost its iron and we found it in the grass. So we bring it to you and the Queen, because we couldn't give you anything today and the doughnuts tasted so good to us! You must take it!"

The king was touched. "Keep each what it found," he said. "To whom Wotan's wish-gold is granted, it increases happiness and treasure for the future

generation. Wear it on a blue ribbon around your neck and keep it as a treasure for future generations! Note as long as this treasure remains tied to you and your tribe, so long are you sure of heaven's grace!"

The children happily departed; but Sindolt, the treasurer, grimly threw his drinking horn on the table so that it boomed. He had, however, quickly emptied it beforehand, for he was too thrifty to throw down a full horn like that! He wiped his wine-soaked beard and scolded: "All the found gold lost to the treasury! If you, Lord King, continue to be so mild, then you will be like Albrich the Quarx, and no one will call you the treasure finder! Then your guardian can fill the chests with stupid pebbles and throw the keys with them into the Moravia!"

"Lightning and blue fire!" cried Suntarold the Hagestalde. "Do you carry a sword or a shovel? When the chest is empty, take it out and fill it again. Rome has more gold than the king's treasure chest!"

The king and queen laughed at this, and the honest treasurer had to put up with many a teasing word, but this did not make him unamused. He reached again for the discarded drinking horn, but could catch it only after several mishaps. A mischievous goblin must have been responsible for the fact that when he thought he had caught it, it teasingly rolled away from him again. At last he caught it happily, but then he also held it securely, as befitted a royal treasurer.

With the falling tide of the royal cellar, which the cellar master perceived quite sadly, cheerfulness rose in the measure of all drinking companions; for always when one bowl of the scales is sinking, the other is rising.

More merrily the horns circled, more whirling the round dance turned around the Donar oak. The shadows of the revelers and the dancers stretched out more and more and finally sank into the twilight of the evening.

Then from the tower of the castle gate the horn call of the castle warden resounded, as a shaking reminder that a beautiful day in the life of Stilifrida had sunk into Narvi's realm.

A cool evening wind blew around the glowing foreheads of the men and carried from the castle ramparts Kadolz's watchman's song over the city:

"Already the food of the sun eater sinks down
Wearily descended to Rinda's heights,
The ripening giant's thorn is at work,
The wet haired ones rise up, and the tired sleep.
At the northern edge of the vast earth,
Beneath the well-tree's outermost root,
Ghoulish giants wake from their rest,
Spooks and dwarfs and black-alive stuff.

There the forces sap, there the arms sink,
The white sword-god staggers dizzily,
Faintness now lies in the night's breeze,
Confusing the senses of all beings."

Chapter Eight
At Urda's Well

High peace lay on the mountains and the early red dawn flamed above. The seemingly old Albruna gazed with pensive eyes high above the grove of the gods on the small platform of the mighty dome, which towered above the proud castle of the gods on the high mountain of Stronegg.

It might well be one of the most important places of worship in the wide Germanic region, for it was strengthened with ramparts, towers and fortifications, as only a proud warrior nation could consecrate to its battle-hardened king of the gods.

As a novice in the tenderest age of childhood, "Albruna von Stronegg" had begun her priestly career, was then ordained as a healer and Norn to the priesthood, but had to resign from this office with increasing age to leave it to younger priestesses. Admitted to the inner council, she now remained invisible to the people, who were not allowed to notice the change in the person of the healing councilors, since these were to appear to them as superhuman beings endowed with eternal youthful beauty.

Only the kings, the kotingen descended from gods, were aware of this high secret. The "wise women" of the inner council instructed the king's children in the highly sacred secrets of runic lore, the deeply hidden meaning of myths, riddles and songs of the gods, they taught them the rules of poetry, song, rituals and magic customs, as well as the hidden powers of healing herbs.

These wise women, as soon as they had retired from the service of the Norns, had to appear as old women, and when they left the Hutberg, they had to behave as ghostly beings, in order to keep the people at a shy distance. But the chief of the wise women, the high priestess, was called Albruna. After the death of her predecessor, the present Albruna was chosen by the other wise women to be the head of the sanctuary of Stronegg, although she had not yet reached the age of forty.

According to custom, however, she appeared gray and unbowed, like an eerie corpse that had risen from the grave.

Thus she sat high up on the dome of the round building and gazed thoughtfully over the treetops of the sacred grove, which were golden in the early sunshine, while the animals of the forest cheered in many thousand-voiced calls towards the awakening sun.

Now Albruna had raised her head, as if she wanted to spy something that should come from the rising of the sun.

In nearby Stronsdorf, too, it had come alive. Servant and maid went with lively singing to the field. There a fresh morning breeze carried this song to the merry height of the tower dome:

"In honeycombed gold the sun awakes,
To the depths the shadows press;
Fresh the hunter feels the courage kindled,
The spooks and rats are scared away.

He fetches his spear, his good dog
And with defiant bearing
Out into the forest's overgrown ground,
The meadow he wants to hunt.

From morning on he hunts, his foot never tires,
And still hunts in the evening sunlight;
Now already the night approaches with silent gruesome greeting
In moonlight flickering floods.

Lost by the dangerous tracks tangle;
He sees the mountain towering -
Beautiful hunter, what are you hunting in the home of the ghosts?
Beautiful hunter?' he hears asked.

O hunter so fine, O my hunter so proud!' -
So he hears the elf say -
"Missing the trail, you drove through the wood,
I myself will now hunt you down!'

Her mouth was so red, and her breath so hot,
As gold were her hair's waves,
Her eye was so blue, her bosom snow-white -
She kissed the hunter.

In the forest it was so dark, in the forest so silent,
The hunter's senses were dimmed
She held him in her arms, the hunt had turned around,
In the forested solitude deep inside.

But when from blissful intoxication he awoke,
He saw the hall stretching in horror
The hall, sunk in the mountain shaft,
That old songs mention.
With flashing crown the maiden stands in the hall,
Many candles shine and gleam,
She holds in her hand the golden goblet,
She presented it to the paramour.

On a perilous path have I come,' he says,
When will I hunt again?' -
The elf, she laughs: I will not let you,
Forget, my love, the question!'

And in the night thou didst overcome me with deceit,
Soon the spell is broken,
Before the sun the dark hauntings do not exist:
It's daytime, it's daytime over there!'

Know then: Today was Freya's night,
Where elves practice hunting right,
Thou art a slave to me and my power,
Keep thee hither and thither!'

You shared my camp, you drank my wine,
I'll never let you go;
By day I will give thee leave,
By night you are mine forever!

And do not thou approach lovingly before midnight,
As now I bid thee part,
Then I'll come with whirling weather power,
And take the dead man myself!'------

From horror he seized gasping chased away
Through dawning forest darkness,

But when the sun shines on him, he says
I do not live in the starry glow!'

Night is approaching; the gloomy fate,
Boldly his defiance has commanded him:
There she stands before him, he pushes her back -
'I'll get' - she cries - 'the dead man!'"

The sound of the forest had drowned out the song, and it was uncertain whether it had ended or had been blown away by the wind.

While listening to the song, Albruna had almost forgotten about the flight. Her head sank to her knees, clasped in her hands, in mourning, and a stream of tears wetted her robe.

Sobbing, she repeated the words of the eavesdropping final verse: "I'll get, she cries, the dead one!" She raised her tear-stained eye to the sun and cried out, "Azzo, my Azzo! What did you offer in defiance of my love! I had to break my word and fetch the dead man. Through the nine dark valleys I sent thee to Hel, thee who deserved to be the first of the Valhalla comrades! You are blossomed, and you, my Azzo, are reborn to me, now he shall wear the crown, which was already forged for you, it shall become the carbuncle in the unheraldic ring, as which I once suspected you. How briefly the sun of love shone on us, how superhumanly long the night of separation, barely shaken by mere memory. Unaware of who is father, who is mother, our child grew in the shaft of the Hutberg, but happiness was lost when I took the dead. O, immeasurably sad the Norn's craft! Never did his child's mouth speak to me, never did his youthful heart cheer to me, never did sound to me from a man's breast, the eternally sweet word: Mother! What rock-splitting pain! Like the yawning abyss itself, the gulf between mother and child gapes! He honors me, he loves me as the wise Albruna who read him the eighteen rune-staves, but his child-love is lost to me! Will he rise to the sun, or will he dash to the depths, which his mother shines for him with deceit? And there, where the mother's loving word could guide him, there she herself must ensnare her own son with deceptive speech, with priestly deceit! Will he pass the test to be worthy of the unraveled eighteenth rune? Not without a wife, not without posthumous fame shall he one day ride on horses of smoke to Walfather's army! - And yet I lost my happiness when I took the dead man!"

Tears flowed without restraint and long sighs stifled her words.

The sun had risen higher.

Then Albruna rose. To the east she cast another long scouting glance, then she climbed through the breezeway of the dome on a climbing tree into the interior of the round building.

A spacious windowless hall had taken her in. In the center of it stood an altar-like hearth on which a moderate fire burned; above it hung bubbling a mighty cauldron. Eerily from the walls grinned down bleached sacrificial skulls in great quantity, and not only of sacrificial animals alone; some of the human skulls hanging down here might have moved long years ago under legionary helmets into the country to bleed to death over the sacrificial cauldron of Albruna. Tufts of dried herbs stank in the eyeholes of the skulls and waited to be used for healing potions or other secret arts.

The Albruna let only a fleeting glance wander through the gloom of the hall, then lifted a trapdoor and climbed through it vertically into the interior of the Hutberg. The trapdoor was closed again above her head.

Soon she had reached the bottom of the riser shaft, and now, surrounded by dense darkness, she strode through the maze of passages.

Now reddish lights pierced the triple night and cast their reflection on the walls of the passage. After a few steps it swung around in an arc, and now the full glow of fire met the eye of Albruna. On the ring hearth of a round chamber burned a crackling fire, and above it bubbled an ore kettle, whose white vapors mixed with the smoke, whirling above through an air shaft into the open air. Around the chamber ran a bench, which was not intersected by the corridor, since its sole ran at the same height as the seat of the bench, and this therefore served as a step for the person entering.

An eerie droning sound resounded through the chamber and seemed to make its walls tremble. In addition, the flame crackled and blazed and the flowing brew hissed. The roaring, however, was not caused by the bubbling cauldron; it seemed to come from the side, where the passage that intersected the round chamber was lost again in uncertain darkness.

Up to this point, Albruna had walked without a light. However, when she entered the round chamber, she took a torch from a niche in front of it, which she then lit with the sacred flame of the hearth. Now she took a tuft of "brown dosage" from the eye socket of one of the sacrificial heads, which also decorated this room, and dipped it three times into the bubbling cauldron with incomprehensible murmurs.

Thereupon she solemnly circumambulated the consecration hearth three times in a special way. She took three steps forward, then one step back, and then three steps forward again, followed by another step back, and so on. And to this threefold walk she sang this magic song:

"Once sat the Idise (Disir)
In harmless haste for
Nine eternal nights;
Then sang her yearning
Through thawing tears a
Timid magic song.

There jumped the clasps
Of the stony shackles,
The bonds burst and shattered
Of restraining haste
Binding bands, -
Taming twig tamed
Defiant trolls,
angry dwarves, -
Mandrake's evil root
Showed her the way
From towering ramparts
Of the sheltering castle, -
Freed was Freya!

So help me to salvation
My song's blessing:
My breast is full,
My forehead is steel,
The heart be stone to me,
Shield me the shimmering one,
Like a fence she hides me,
And evil to me goes astray!
Blessing of song
Help me to salvation -
Freed was Freya!"

Albruna had finished the third round. She now clutched the "brown dosage" to her chest as a protective spell against the haunting of the subterranean and strode into the passage opposite to the one through which she had come.

With each step forward, the roar of thunder that seemed to come from the depths became more dreadful.

Now the tunnel widened, the grayish-yellow color of its walls suddenly turned a deep greenish-gray, and crystal sparkled from the rock like infinite stars. There the pond digger's tunnel-breaking day's work had come to an end, for naturally occurring fissures in the primary rock had been reached.

The rough path led to the depths and the stone crevice widened into a mighty cavity, where the smoky torches' red light was lost in hazy twilight.

Idise possibly has the same root as our more familiar Disir, and typically means a wise female ancestor.

Adventurous rock pillars carried the arch, here and there a night-black maw yawned to the depths, above or sideways, and jutting spikes blocked the view with collapsing threatening horror. A thundering roar, and a whooshing hiss shook the air and the blank-staring cliffs.

Mumbling spells, swirled by the gloomy red of the spraying torch, Albruna walked the perilous path, deeper and deeper. The subterranean thunder rolled more and more, and a damp and cold wind made the robe and the hair of the head flutter around the climber. The flickering red light now shone around jutting cliffs. The old woman wriggled around, and it seemed as if floods of fire were pouring down from above in a sudden fall. The torch illuminated a mighty torrent. She stepped forward to where a yawning abyss opened up like a giant dragon that swallowed the thundering waterfall in eternal unquenched thirst. No eye could see where the water was flowing, for fog vapors rose from the yawning maw like shadows, and rose up even veiling the height from where the waters fell. The sight was eerie, the thunderous roar terrible.

But there at the abyss stood again an altar, whose flickering consecration flame was reflected in the waters.

Albruna had stepped forward to the edge of the chasm and sang this rune song into the roar of thunder:

"I look at the ash tree called Schreckross:
White mist nets the top,
Dew from the branches drips down to the valley
And makes the divine rumble at the well of the ford.
Heimdall's Horn I know concealed
Under the high sacred oak,
From Walfather's pledge of wisdom's drink
I see the foaming tide flowing away.
From there the wise women have come,
The wave-born guardians of the tree:
Wurt the one, the other Werdand,
The third was to blame. They carved the runes,
They cast lots, directed life
And knew the fate of beings ahead.
Reborn in the changing and becoming
We wise women guard the healing council,
Preserve the knowledge of runic riddles,
Scoring the runes, laying the lots,
Guide the dust-descended lives
And foresee the runes of destiny." (1)

The Albruna stood motionless in front of the darkly magnificent image of infinity, of becoming and passing away, of giving birth and dying. To the depth the waters shot and rose as steam, in order to fall again as water in the eternal cycle.

Then Albruna raised her head. Fluttering her white hair blew in the aimless whirl of the air. Raising her right hand against the torrent, she broke out into the words: "Thou holy fountain of the ford, from which I drank the tidings of the future, grant me one more drink to refresh my soul for the heavy mission. The tree, whose best root you nourish, is the pedigree of mankind, their child tree! It stands up to the twilight of the gods! Only one of its leaves is the single man, whom withering the storm of time whirls! But the withered dead return like budding foliage to new life, when they drink from your flood of foam the potion of forgetfulness. So also you, my Azzo! In Erchantaug I know you reborn to future glorious deeds, which the Guardian of Fate begrudges you to do. You too, my Erchantaug, will wither one day, but noble heirs far up into the distant future are destined for you. This promises the eighteenth rune still concealed to you! So you too, my Azzo, have not lived without purpose for the future!"

And once more she looked down, pondering, half timidly, half defiantly, into the ravine which roaringly swallowed the breaking torrent.

"Hear me, Azzo, now I fetch the dead!" Shouting this, she rushed back to the altar. Quickly she threw the torch from her, took the tuft of brown thistle, dropped it into the sacrificial flame, and hastily disrobed herself before the fire consumed the herb with a crackle. Then she took up the torch again.

Now she stood there, her still almost youthfully strong body fluttered by the dissolved falling hair and irradiated by the reddish firelight with uncertain light. Fear and horror, but also proud defiance, were on her face as she now climbed onto one of the rocky outcrops, swinging a torch. In it a crevice showed itself, to which the Albruna laboriously made her way. Here stood a ghostly cup.

The skull of a man lined with gold plate was used as a bowl, and the bones

1) The world ash tree Schreckross (Yggdrasil) had been thought with three roots, at each of which a well (spring) rushes. At the first root, with the gods and humans, rushed "Urda's well", which the Norns guarded. The second root reached to the frost giants, where Mimir guarded the spring. To this once Wuotan had to give his second eye for the drink of wisdom as a pledge. This is a profound mythical image and naturalistically interprets the sun reflected in the water as the second of the two eyes of Wuotan. At the third northern root the third of the wells, the "Rauschkessel", roars. There, with the enemies of gods and men, also the world ash tree is threatened with destruction. Neidhagen, the poisonous snake gnaws at the outermost root and damages the tree so that it cannot withstand the last storm. More detailed Grimm, German mythology, Edda, u. a. D.

of the right hand were the handle and foot.

"Come, my Azzo, I'll fetch the dead man!" she cried in a shrill tone. "Return thou hast vowed to the forest mermaid, and the mermaid must fulfill thy and her word! That cut me to the heart, my bogeyman! When you were consecrated to Albruna, whom you kissed as a mermaid, your head offered me the potion of remembrance instead of the refused kiss, and it will also be you who shall once offer the drink of forgetfulness for the journey through the darkness of the nine valleys. With me you will sink into the night of oblivion!"

Torchlit, Albruna slipped under the "hanging stone", the skull cup hung around her neck on a string, on which the vertebrae of Azzo's back were strung like pearls.

Now she went to the depths. From jag to jag the naked woman pushed herself down between the staring rock beside the thundering waters. Vertically the damp shining black walls shone. Reddishly glowing from the crackling spraying light of the torch, thunderously roaring from the falling tide, Albruna silently descended to the gruesome abyss. Without wavering in her trust in the power of practiced magic, she conquered the mute fright of the terrible beginning with timid courage.

She had reached the "Thunder Bridge."

A boldly curved arch of rock, churned by raging waters in days of primeval time, spanned the chasm there. Here she would have been able to fill the cup of horror, for just beside her the waters rushed to the depths. Neither she, nor any of the others had ever followed further the fall of the hissing tide to draw from Urdbrunner the rune healing potion. Today, however, she wanted to penetrate to the furthest of the depths; after all, "Sinnreger's Foam Tide" must be most sacred there, where the vapors welled up.

Examining the path, which no breathing being had walked before, she carefully tried to protect the lamp from the falling tide. Had it been extinguished, she would never have found her way back, never have seen Erchantaug, her and Azzo's child.

She trembled when this thought came to her soul. But kind gods had shown her the way, and fighting down the timid doubts, she pushed deeper and deeper, undaunted by the roar and roar, toward the center of the earth. For this she intended to reach.

On a dangerously slippery path they had reached the deepest depths.

The roar of the tide was terrifying, and foamy spray splashed uphill from the thundering impact of the water.

With difficulty, Albruna pushed her way through the crevice and under the rocky slope until she spotted a safe shelter for the torch. Here she left the torch.

Then, with the cup raised, she entered the flowing spray. Unmoved, she

stood before the throng of terrors and sang this magic song into the roar of thunder:

Once the victorious sat together in the ring,
With noble Aesir they held healing council;
Murmuring the heavenly rulers consulted,
Because slumbering images frightened Balder.
Wotan, the father of the beings, went away,
Strapped the saddle on Sleipnir's back
And rode down to the cave of mist.
There a dog came out of the gate to meet him,
His chest was covered with blood,
Angrily he growled at the magician;
But Wotan rode on, the way roared,
Till Hel's high dwelling was reached
Then Wotan turned to the east entrance
And sang a mighty wake-up song.

Alone she sat far away, as he drove to her,
And fearfully he peered into the old woman's eye.
What do you want to ask me, what do you want to explore?
I know where you, Wotan, lost your eye!
I know the source of the knowledgeable Mimir,
Where you, as a dispenser of revealing spells
Thy eye as a pledge to the wise consecrated,
Where Mimir now drinks mead every morning
The excellent drink from Walfather's pledge!'
So hear me too, Albruna the Hechsa,
Who dared to descend to the dusky deep,
To drink the drink from Azzo's pledge
From the refreshing spring of the primordial fountain
In the deepest depths of the All-Mother Earth!

Allfather orders -
Aesir rule -
Vanir know -
Norns wise -
Elves strong -
Dursen wait -
Dwarves work -
Yngvi wanders -
Valkyries urge -

Humans suffer -

All you united in Allfather the One,
Consecrate with salvation spell immoderately the salvation drink
At the Urdbrunnen from Azzo's pledge
To helping healing advice to the bold Koting,
Promote the consecration, you Ruler of the Worlds,
Fulfill the runes' unraveling spell!"

The swirling waves roared in, breaking on the cliffs and with a slapping impact, the foam of spray fizzed up, mixing with the steam and water dust with a deafening roar.

But in the middle of it stood Albruna, defiantly raising her cup, now almost swallowed up by the milky tide, now again shunned by the softening waves; soon the masses of foam licked up like flames, soon the arms of the waves snaked around her and threatened to pull her into the whirlpools with them. She stood like a rock, but the cup did not fill.

Then Albruna cast an even stronger spell to force the might of the fountain.

With the skull cup she drew three circles around her head through the roar in the whizzing airs, and then described against the waters with it the seventeen signs of the magic runes. In a commanding tone, she spoke the magic name to each of them:

Fehu
Uruz
Thurisaz
Raidho
Gebo
Wunjo
Hagalaz
Nautiz
Isa

Jara
Sowulo
Teiwaz
Berkana
Ehwaz
Mannaz
Laguz
Othala

Again she drew three circles around herself with Azzo's skull cup, then she silently drew the eighteenth rune, as the most sacred and powerful, without addressing it, in the air; it was this sign: T (Irminsul)

Three times three circles drawn around the head ended the incantation.

Again she stood rock-steady like her trust in the dreadful tumult of the shuddering maelstrom.

But the furious dance of the waves continued, the thunderous roar of the

whirling torrent around the powerful Albruna continued.

Writhing like a beastial dragon about to leap, a wave adventurously burst, gurgling and rumbling, out of the abyss of the tide, rising high in foaming treetops, as if to meet the crashing waters, to break through the ceiling of the cavity in fury and devour the world. But overcome by the mighty guardians of the well, it bent its neck in a wide arc, the gurgling whirlpools howled hideously, and with crashing surf the wave monster crashed back on Albruna, who timidly held up the cup.

In the collapsing flash flood the bold one disappeared, but powerless the waters melted away at her indomitable courage.

Like the foam-born Freya herself, she seemed to emerge from the waters, which now receded and sank to the depths.

Full of noble pride, calm as marble, Albruna, like a goddess, stood as the victress among the roar of the waves; the Urdbrunnen itself had filled her cup with Sinnreger's flood of foam.

With a long devotional draught she emptied Azzo's cup.

Again she drew three circles around her head, again she drew the eighteenth rune three times in the showering roar, again after three circles she described, starting from backwards with "Odil" and ending with "Feh", the seventeen runes addressed against the raging flood and released the spell with the last three circles.

Now she jumped out of the whirlpools. Quickly she seized the torch and began the ascent.

After many a perilous step and daring leap from slippery mat to foam-covered cliff, she had crossed the "Thunder Bridge".

Her path became easier, less surrounded by the terrors of the depths, and already the shadow of the "hanging stone" stood out in sharp outline from the reddishly illuminated cloud of haze, for behind it burned the fire of the altar.

Soon the last ledge was climbed, Azzo's skull cup recovered in its crevice. Stepping in front of the altar, she chanted a few more staves to appease the wrathful forces of the deep and shield herself from their pursuit.

Then she slipped on her robe, strode back to the round hall, and there, after three times of circuit, threw the torch into the embers, unashamed.

Through the threefold night of the maze of corridors she now scurried and soon she stood again in the round hall of the tower. There she met the three young healers, who greeted her with reverence. Silently she returned the greeting with dignity and ascended to the platform of the dome, where she sat down in a crouching position and once again, as this morning, sent her peeping eyes to the east. -

Inside the hall, however, the three healers had shaken their heads in amazement and whispered to each other: "What may the 'Old Woman of the

Mountain' have that she rises from the crevice at such an inopportune time, she who otherwise dwells like a buried person only in tombs?

She had been sitting up there for a long time, and the hot midday sun was burning down on her. Then it flamed joyfully from the waiting eye. Shrouded in a swirling cloud of dust, Erchantaug's band of twelve rode swiftly near, and Albruna saw Azzo's son.

For a while Albruna had to struggle for composure, but then she descended into the round hall, where the three young norns were silently working around the kettle brew and the hearth fire, as if they had never whispered anything secretly to each other.

But the young Norns were to be even more astonished; for not, as they had hoped, did the old woman descend further into the inner shafts, but she had placed herself before the hearth flame and began to sing the following bars:

"Hear, ye of the salvation council,
Hear the Albruna, the prophetess, proclaim,
Hear: Herian, the ruler of the heavens,
Approaches the castle at Urda's fountain! -
It is time for council at the judgement seat
At Urda's well:
She sat and was silent, she sat and pondered
At riddle runes,
She sat and sang a spell,
She descended to the whirlpool
Of the rapid fountain in thundering depths
By Heimdall's horn,
She drew Wisdom from foaming springs,
She drank the drink
Foreboding Albruna!------
Open the gates to the King of the Aesir,
To all the heroes!
Allow the gray steeds to graze
In the bridling kennel,
Then close the castle! -
To the Twelve mead with beseeching countenances
In hollow horns,
From a boiling kettle juicy brew,
Bread, too, according to custom. -
In Silence weaving! -
Let the One reign unashamed,

The Guardian of the World!
Do not dare to resist Wuotan, the noble one,
To the shaft you climb
Into the dark depths!
Herian waiting, the eleven remain
Here in the hall!
Your mead in the heroes' horns
Silent and spinning, -
Keep my word!"

Silently, after singing these bars, Albruna descended through the shaft to the depth. The three youthful Norns, however, proceeded to fulfill the commandment of the "old woman of the mountain".

Quickly they had brought out mighty pieces of sacrificial meat from the inside of the mountain and thrown them into the cauldron, a huge mead cauldron was wound up on ropes and a second one was put in readiness; for they thought of Donar's master drink and presupposed that the father of the gods would at least do the same as his flame-bearded son.

Much more was to be procured, and so it came about that the healers worked silently despite the enormous temptation to relieve their souls in murmuring speech about the expected guest.

Erchantaug had ridden to the royal palace of Stilifrida. After a deceptive ride to the south, he had entered the oak forest to the west in order to stay there. With the sun he set out again and continued his journey, past many a castle and many a sanctuary, and only there, where a mighty man sat, did he speak in, guesting with sacrifice and magic Gambin, the German king. Thus he himself was the herald of the new German crown.

On the third morning after his ride, however, the sun had already risen high above the forest mountains, and Wuotan's army was still camped in the twilight of the high forest.

Again the hunt had offered the early meal, but still the train rested, for Erchantaug was silent, almost sad. He sat lonely at the edge of the high forest above the valley and it seemed as if he listened to what the birds told each other in the branches. His eyes gazed steadfastly westward, where the valley narrowed and seemed to disappear into the forest; but there, above the forest tops, barely visible to the eye, rose the round tower of Stronegg.

Memories from his childhood dawned in his soul when he saw the tower of the sanctuary; was it there where he dreamed of proud sword deeds, where he nurtured the bold hope in his bosom to be celebrated one day by the singers who walk with the kings near the gods, was it there where Albruna threw him the eighteenth rune. - The eighteenth rune! - Anxious doubts

frightened his soul, constricted his chest. Had he done right, had he unraveled it correctly? Was it not she, she, the Albruna, who promised him its solution? If he had made a mistake in his conceit, if - he did not dare to think the thought; it swirled before his senses.

Hastily he had jumped up and already his army horn was booming.

Soon, in full chase, Erchantaug's band of twelve raced up the forest valley to where the bone gallows stood, the sacred border tree of the sanctuary of Stronegg.

It was a stately larch tree, in the branches of which the bones of the last sacrificial steeds hung pale and rattled eerily in the wind. There, where everyone else put on shackles before entering the holy grove of gods, there, where everyone else did not dare to rise from the ground and rolled out if he happened to stumble and fall, there Erchantaug and his followers hunted on smoking steeds through the sacred forest and his army horn roared, almost menacingly defiant, into the rustling vault of leaves. Then the forest thinned out, a mighty rampart rose from the green, treeless clearing, above it a second one, then the Wuotan bed stood there, and above it the Hutberg with its mighty domed tower rose almost to the heights of clouds.

But hardly had Wotan's army ridden into the wide forest ring, hardly had the horses trampled the holy ground of the place of judgment of the gods, then three battle maidens in helmets, shod and armed, appeared and bent the knee. There the horses stood like stone figures until the battle maidens had risen, who now took Erchantaug's steed by the reins and led it into the castle.

Through a wooden tower with a raised gate, the procession now went up a narrow hollow way, which suddenly turned to climb between the Wotanbed and the Hutberg in snail coils. The horsemen swung themselves out of the saddles and strode up the Hutberg, while the Gods-guards took over the steeds for maintenance.

Entering the round hall, Erchantaug sat down on the high seat prepared for him, the hounds at his feet, the ravens on his armpits, while his retinue silently took their places on the bearskins of the round bench.

At the altar lay twelve enormous drinking horns, from which Hechsa took one, filled it with mead, and, kneeling, offered it to Erchantaug. The Wala and Truda did the same with the others.

Erchantaug silently emptied his horn, rose and descended through the trapdoor to the depths, as the old woman from the mountain had done just before. The white dogs lay down beside the altar, only the ravens flew up and sat down among the bleached sacrificial skulls above the ledge, after circling the hall a few times. There, sadly and taciturnly, raven and raven sat side by side, almost as if they were mourning the fact that all these magnificent skulls had been bleached by the sun ages ago.

The armed maidens spun and sang magic songs or filled the horns of the quietly drinking followers of Erchantaug. When the hour of the meal had come, they took it together with the knights, but all in silence and without shouting.

Erchantaug had descended. He, too, walked through the many corridors without a light, as Albruna had done this morning; for he had spent his childhood in them, and they were as intimately, almost more intimately, familiar to him than the hidden chambers of his own heart. Soon he had reached a strange hall.

Having dropped the curtain behind him which separated the room from the corridor, he surveyed a domed round hall, the walls of which were shod with a glossy layer of blue. In the flickering blue fire that only dimly illuminated this hall, the eye lacked all clues, and so the room appeared larger than it really was.

The most remarkable thing about this hall was that it contained the replica of the outer appearance of the sanctuary, namely the oval hill of the hat, in front of it the pyramid of the bed of Wuotan, surrounded by the ramparts and the wide step in front of them. On the Wuotan bed, which towered above the height of a man, the blue fire crackled with an eerie glow.

Here Erchantaug, booming three times, struck his army horn and, facing the Hutberg, sang these bars:

"Awake Albruna, you wise one, awake!
I call you at the gate of the dead;
As once Allfather awakened the Wala
In gaping Hellaklamm!"

Then Albruna, pale as a ghost, lifted her upper body out of the structure of the Hutberg and remained motionless in this position like a corpse half risen from the grave. A deeply descending veil shrouded her face in deep darkness, and only now and then, when the fire flared up, a ghostly glow like northern light twitched over it.

For a long time she sat motionless at the edge of the Hutberg opposite her son, who could not suspect that the only living being he recognized above him was Albruna, who had given him life and limb, that she was his mother! Now came the dreaded moment, against which she had been blessed with a spell at the well of the ford; now she sat opposite him who, driven by her confusing spell of fate, was perhaps hastening to his doom; now the loving word of her mother could warn him of the dangers, but to speak that word was denied her. She was not yet able to say a word, and only with difficulty did she preserve the calm and dignity of her posture. How she was urged to draw him to her heart, to ask him about what he had experienced, what he had thought, what

he had done; but she was the all-knowing one and therefore was not allowed to ask any questions. With deceptive words she had to elicit from him what she wanted to know; for she stood before him not as his mother, but as the all-knowing and the all-advising Albruna.

Obeying the compulsion of the situation, she finally pressed out these bars with difficulty in a toneless voice:

"Nor did thy warhorn yet make its call,
Nor yet flamed a raging fire;
Nor gnaws revenge on rich Carnuntum,
Therefore turn my wonder Thy truthful mouth."

With trembling voice the Albruna had sung these empty bars to initiate the intercourse with Erchantaug. The excitement of the Albruna had escaped him, only the venerable age of her appearance had seized him powerfully. Too much penetrated by the divinity of his mission, he saw in her only a being breathed by divine breath, of whose omniscience he was convinced. Therefore, obeying the rules of the rune staffs, he returned the received staffs with only a few hints:

"The truth you keep, wise Albruna,
With healing counsel in Hutberg's halls;
Nor did my Warhorn sound its call,
Nor flamed a raging fire,
Nor revenge on rich Carnunt gnaws,
But turn thy wonders to my truth:
Already united throng to the German eagle
The hosts of the Germans to the shield lord;
Freed from the shameful bondage of the slave girl
Is Gisalhild, Gambin's child;
And unraveled the eighteenth rune riddle
Has Victoryfather Wotan himself to me."

A trembling and weaving shook the form of Albruna as Erchantaug remembered the eighteenth rune. How the unraveling would take place, whether it would lead to salvation, to doom, she did not know yet, and yet she could not dare to ask.

As the place demanded and the law of the time-honored custom, the conversation between mother and son moved only in rhymes; but soon it had become clear to the acumen of the priestess in which sense the eighteenth rune was unraveled. With ever growing amazement and dwindling

apprehension she then learned what had been prepared and had taken place in Carnuntum and Stilifrida, and with high satisfaction she realized Erchantaug's vow not to be free as Austrorand for Gisalhild until after the mission had been accomplished. She had quickly recognized how this self-restraint was his spur, but at the same time shield and protection against hesitant doubts and human impotence. Now she knew that Azzo's son was immune to adverse fate. But as before the pain of doubt, now she had to hide the joy of certainty; also the jubilation of the soul, which made the mother's heart beat faster when she recognized the son in all his greatness, also this had to be covered by the priestess' veil.

If before she had known how to defy worry, now her strength threatened to slacken in the face of joy, and that is why she closed the rune conversation almost abruptly. But she silently thanked the gods and goddesses for the only happiness she carried in her bosom, and renewed her vow to sacrifice her mother's heart to her priestly duty again and to never complain about the fate that gave her a son only to take him away again.

She lifted herself up, the veil slipped from her head, which now, surrounded by white curls, shone eerily in a blue glow. Sparkling eyes she clung to the figure of her son and sang the following staffs in farewell:

"Ride home then, Wuotan, and keep thee glorious,
Also announce to me henceforth battle-bold tidings,
Until Carnuntum thou shalt break, destroy,
Until Austrorand and Gisa may happily embrace."

The staves had died away. For another moment the ghostly one stood as if spellbound; she spread her arms toward Erchantaug, then she heaved a deep sigh, and, sobbing, she sank noiselessly to the depths.

Shaken, Erchantaug stood before the image of Hutberg; he did not know how to interpret Albruna's departure.

For a long time he stared into the flickering blue light, lost in deep thought. At last he turned to go, and slowly behind the departing man the curtain in front of the strange sanctuary sank.

Soon he emerged from the rising shaft of the round hall, where his warriors of the mead were sipping. The dogs snarled around him, and the pair of ravens cawed at him, as if to announce that they had been well fed.

Kneeling down, the Hechsa offered the full hom to the returned god, who emptied it and sang these bars:

"I lift up my face to Aesenheim,
Desired wish I am granted;

To the smoking forest, to the red drink of arms
May the flame of wounds now rage!"

Then he rose silently and strode out of the hall without a greeting. His men followed him.

But Albruna sat on the dome of the tower, and for a long time her tear-stained eye hurried to that point in the forest mountains, from which the golden helmet of the departing Erchantaug flashed across to her for the last time.

Chapter Nine

Rome's Legation

Gambin, the king, had become silent and thoughtful. He had sent the god's messenger through all the districts, the kings and dukes, the princes and counts of all the lands had responded to the call, and yet Gambin did not feel satisfied. Already the princes as well as the free countrymen flocked together in the German royal palace Stilifrida, in order to show the imperial shield, the imperial crown and to swear the oath of allegiance to the German king elected by Wuotan. All came. They, and yet Gambin was not satisfied; he had thought of the dignity of the German king differently. They remained what they had been before, each for himself lord and king, and he, the king of kings, only the shadow image of such; for they still had free will, and where he might have commanded, there he had to humiliatingly wrest the desired promises from them with pleading words. - What an ungodly gift of the gods the crown of Wuotan seemed to him!

It seemed too small to him that they were not his vassals, too small that they bound themselves with costly oaths only to unite against Rome, never to stand in single combat with her and never to let themselves be divided by her again, too small that they paid homage to him as their prince of the army, but that they wanted to see nothing more than a federal head under the sacred crown; this seemed too small to the king, and therefore he was silent and disgruntled.

Now the kings and princes, the counts and freedmen were sitting in the high hall of the king's palace at Stilifrida. But Gambin, the German king, was enthroned on the high seat, under the imperial shield, with a frowning face.

Many beautiful words had already been spoken; one for all, all for one they wanted to fight, stand or fall, they would all be brothers, sons of Tyr, the mighty one, no special name would separate them from now on, they wanted to be and remain Germans, one people, one army and shield. But all this could not satisfy Gambin; he wanted to be a people's king, not an armies' king, and

deep in his mind he envied the Roman Caesar. But could not those defiant kings in the future be reduced to vassals, even to his governors? Rome has shown how to begin such a thing! Patience, little kings, your time is also measured! Gambin thought this, but he wisely concealed it, and in the comfort of this thought his countenance became more friendly. He then spoke a lot about the unity of the German princes and how Germany's power was based on this unity.

When he had finished, the Alemanni king Makrian emptied his horn, placed it booming in front of him and spoke this word: "It is true what Gambin, the king of the alliance, has told us. The Cheruscan Armin had destroyed Varus and defeated Germanicus, because the kings and princes had been united, but they could not make use of the victories, when they stepped on each other's beards out of jealousy. Then it was over. It is true that Marcus Aurelius would never have seen Carnuntum again if the Roman's wit had not been sharper than his fencing iron. The cunning Roman had concluded a treaty with each individual prince; each believed to draw the biggest lot, to become the most powerful, they ate each other up like hungry predatory animals, while the Romans fled across the Danube, only sending back daggers and poison instead of the promised gold. It is true that Valentinian would never have dared to lay one brick on top of another on the Rhine if we Alemanni and Swabians had been united. It is therefore also true when he says that no Roman tower should rise on the Danube and that those on the Rhine should collapse when we are united, powerful for action. Be united, only in this way will you hit Roma in the heart!"

For a moment there was silence; then a murmur began, they thumped their fists on the oak planks of the tables and joyfully waved the foaming drinking horns - the old custom of applauding approval.

But Makrian had more to tell; he wiped his mead-damp beard, placed the emptied drinking horn on the oak table, and spoke:

"Even before I saw the holy spear, Gambin, even before my messengers reached Lake Constance, I knew the tale of the Wuotan crown. Twelve years ago, the Victory-Father rode into my palace with glad tidings. He sang runic tales of the Germanic future in the company of the pine trees. Three fountains" - said his song - "rush at the three roots of the eternal ash tree, and three rivers I grant to the Germans! The Danube as far as the Black Sea, the Rhine as far as Gaul and where beaked dragons fly to distant Greenland on clouds of the world's oceans, and finally the Etsch, which rolls its blue floods southward to guard against the treachery of the Welsh, against Roman robbery! Be united, protect the Danube and the Rhine, conquer the Etsch, and the Earth is yours!' Such was Wuotan's word, and therefore, Hail to you, Germans, Hail to you, Gambin, to me, the King of the Germans!"

The Alemannic king had finished and stood erect with his horn raised;

Gambin, however, jumped up and threw himself at the speaker's breast, his gloomy thoughts had vanished, and the two kings vigorously clashed their drinking horns. Rattling, the other royal revelers had also jumped from the benches, a clanking and clanging resounded through the hall, they struck sword and shield at each other, raised the mead horns high and waved them jubilantly above their heads.

Then Kadolz, the gatekeeper, rushed into the hall, his cheek reddened from his hasty run. "Gambin, my king!" he called over the assembled to the high seat, "Romans are approaching the Palace! Flags of peace wave before the splendid throng, they approach as friends!"

Suddenly the cheering was hushed, None found a word, only Suntarolt the Hagestalde cried, "Lightning and blue fire! To arms! Lord King, grant it to the old Roman spoiler to whip the Welsh dogs out of their skins! By rock-breaker and ice-breaker where are they?"

"Hold! Restrain your wrath!" cried the king; but already Suntarolt, with a powerful curse, had thrown his drinking horn to the earth and trampled it furiously.

Then Gambin laughed aloud and commanded the innkeeper to give the grim old man another silver horn instead of the smashed horn, because such a horn was less sensitive to kicks.

But the old man said: "By Agez's fetters! No hard feelings, Mr. King! No horn is good for a sword-wielder to drink from, if Roman dogs are at the ready! Let us go, more iron than we need flashes in this hall! By Fernes clan!"

Again the king's guests laughed; then the innkeeper had brought the silver horn to the king, who drank from it to old Grimbeard and, handing it to him, said, "There drink and wash the wrath from your heart; wait for the time to whirring sword-swinging, it is near enough!"

With the kings he went out to the ramparts. It was a distinguished procession. All armed and adorned with crown and royal ornaments, they surrounded Gambin, who walked under the holy crown of Wuotan, the imperial shield on his arm.

The townspeople of Stilifrida, however, flocked to the ramparts and gates.

The Romans had come close to Stilifrida's outer surrounding wall, which encircled the castle rock at its foot. Warrior music swirled joyous tunes as the procession of horsemen and footmen halted and dispatched three horsemen to the city. Two of these were tuba-blowers, but the third had brandished a white ensign.

It was Marcus Equitius, the Magister Armorum.

Arrived at the entrance of the castle, he let blow a fanfare, whereupon he shouted against the arms-rigged ramparts:

"You proud royal Stilifrida, open your gates to the messengers of peace!

Emperor Valentinian sends greetings and hails Gambin, the Quade King!"

Again the tuba-blowers had blown a merry little piece, then the gatekeeper Kadolz called down from the gate-tower: "Greetings to you handsome little horseman! I am Kadolz the Gatekeeper and not the king, so ride on until you see the red tower, there stands the king, ask him! The gate remains closed. Leave your blowing, Stilifrida has enough minstrels!"

Loud laughter had followed the words of the wall warden from the men and shouts like "Haiö, Narrö!" were audible. Then Equitius' countenance reddened, the vein of anger swelled and with a clenched fist he shouted the answer, "Wait, you clod, your king will teach you how to welcome Valentinian's envoys!"

Discouraged, he turned his steed to ride along the rampart to the red tower amid the howls of the armed men.

There he saw with astonished eyes Gambin, the king, surrounded by the kings and lords and stately princely followers.

"Caesar Valentinianus semper Augustus and the Senate of Rome, send thee O King messages and gifts of friendship; command the gate to be opened, for the entrance of the Emperor's legation from Rome!"

Then Gambin stepped forward to the willow-woven breastwork of the rampart and called down: "Greetings to you, herald! You see for yourself the number of my guests; there is no room for you in the palace; but it is never our custom to deprive the guest of his health. Twelve of you ride in, but the others wait for my return where they stand. But as guests you are all worthy of me; a hall shall be readied for you and royal food and drink, also royal peace shall be granted to you. Delay until my marching voice calls you, for castle and city are not prepared for the reception of such noble guests. Therefore wait in patience and be well!"

With that, the king turned and left the rampart with the knights of the wall.

Equitius rode dejectedly back to the crowd of Romans. Could he tolerate that the messengers of the Lord of the World should wait like hungry beggars in front of such a miserable nest until it opened its gates, could he endure the poorly veiled mockery with impunity, could he consent to the humiliation of riding in only with the twelve? Who knows how many days they would lie outside the city, exposed to the ridicule of the barbarians, who knows if they would not then be forced to leave in disgrace? Unable to make a decision, he thought to take counsel with his comrades.

Although Equitius was the leader and head of the delegation, the legionary tribune Veloges Paetus, a young patrician of consular rank, was considered the imperial envoy, so that the Magister Armorum could inconspicuously perform his secret task of exploring the Quadia. Therefore, prudence advised to pretend not to notice the scorn. The soldier resisted the diplomat in Equitius;

he conferred with Paetus at length, and yet there was no advice but to wait. So they remained. He was to ride in himself, Gambin had said; at least he could see the wretched nest that called itself a royal city and probably thought itself more than Rome itself. Grimly he clenched the hilt of his sword in his convulsively clenched fist and paced up and down rattling, as he might have done a short time ago if the relief had kept him waiting too long at the guard post.

Then he stopped and resumed the conversation with the completely perplexed Paetus. It was now decided that Paetus and Equitius should ride into the city with the two litterarii, Ulpius and Serenius, the two tuba-blowers, and six more mounted men, to present the letter and gift. Paetus was to carry the imperial scroll, Ulpius the golden chain with the heavy gold image of the emperor, Serenius the precious drinking horn, artfully carved from a single mighty elephant tusk, with a golden saucer representing a dragon with fierce emerald eyes; it fell to Equitius, however, to lead the magnificently bridled Barbary black stallion, which was loaded with a precious commander's armor including sword and purple cloak.

But also in the hall of the kings Gambin planned with the kings of the council.

There were many suggestions; each of them thought that his was the best and was surprised that the others did not think the same. It was not far from astonishment to angry speech, and it would not have taken long for the high lords of men to get at each other's throats most emphatically. It was not surprising that during the royal quarrel Gambin again thought that the crown of Wuotan was only a doubtful gift! He would have liked to make a ruling, but the case was too difficult; even he was not able to make the right decision so quickly.

Suddenly there was silence in the hall; the words of argument on the lips were silenced by astonishment without measure. Suddenly, in the gulf of the hall, stood three armed Valkyrie, exactly like those whom Erchantaug had met at the gate of the castle of the Norns at Stronegg. They were the three healers of Stilifrida: Wolchangard the Hechsa, Trudelinda the Truda and Helwiga the Wala.

Gambin went out to meet the three, offering them a welcome with a foaming horn.

Thereupon they stepped in front of the high seat and sang in staffed rune songs the healing advice, how to meet the Roman.

Their stay was short.

After they had left the hall, they walked the ramparts of the royal city occupied by the townspeople three times, singing magic songs.

The bearers of arms on the ramparts had hardly seen the battle-armored maidens of their sanctuary, when a welcome cheer thundered towards them.

Rattling, the shields thundered, a roaring wave broke like a thunderstorm through the shields, and the battle signs were swirled wildly in the air, so that the Romans down in the grass almost paled.

Equitius, hearing the noise, did not know the reason for it, but he took the precaution of putting his little band in battle order, lest he should be surprised.

With anxious apprehension, he saw a crowd of at least a thousand men armed with breastplates and helmets approaching him, without the ramparts spears being thinned out at all. He did not have much confidence in the white flag that the foremost man waved; why a thousand swords for a peaceful action?

Armored and helmeted, shielded and armed was the wielder of the ensign, also his salute sounded defiant enough. "Roman murder and Castle fire!" he shouted as he faced Equitius, who also waved his white flag. "I Randmar, the marching lord, bring you royal salute. All these swords I bring forth for your screen and protection: such is the king's will. I shall also build you a high hall, slaughter these oxen and calves, pigs and sheep for you and make this wine, since you are the king's guests! Of course, we would rather split your skull, but the king has refused. And so we want to keep peace and take care of you as friends and royal guests. Don't be afraid of our brothers and swords, the Quad is used to them; he gets into bed with them and sits with them drinking his mead. Strike, by Roman murder and castle fire, I am the king's messenger and bailiff!"

The Marshal Randmar enjoyed being quite bearish and rude to the Roman. Therefore he did not wait for his answer, but shouted, "Hoiho, the cattle!" Then the cattle were unhitched and made timid. Angrily the men stampeded the ground and a furious hunting fight began with grim earnest until the animals lay felled. Also the sows were hunted fairly, and only the sheep and calves contemptuously left to the knives of the servants.

Thereupon Randmar again acted as a prudent landlord, but coarse and rough. The wine barrels were brought up and the cauldrons and fireplaces prepared. Unnoticed, however, the Marshal's armed men had surrounded the Romans and locked them in a tightly knit ring. They were as good as trapped.

Equitius could not prevent this, although he perceived with sorrow that they had premeditatedly made all sneaking and secret scouting impossible for him; he built his last hope on his entry into Stilifrida. In order to escape Randmar's attention, he had called Paetus the emperor's messenger, but the Marshal had not been misled by this, and so the Magister Armorum had to grudgingly submit to the inevitable.

That he had to thank the healers, who had revealed the purpose of his mission and the importance of his person to King Gambin and had indicated to him the means to meet the danger; this, of course, he could not guess, and

that is why all these events, which were so completely different from the usual way of things, were incomprehensible to him.

But he could not dwell on his gloomy thoughts for long, for a second band of a thousand swords was now approaching. Sindolt, the king's treasurer, was their leader; he too waved the flag of peace.

As sharply as Equitius looked out, he could not see how and where these mighty armies had left the city; nor did he notice any decrease in the garrison of the ramparts. He could see the sloping castle path, but it remained quiet; the troops must have camped outside the city, he thought. Of course, he had not thought that Stilifrida could have more than one gate at her disposal.

Sindolt approached Equitius to greet him, but he refused and pointed to Paetus as the emperor's envoy.

"Oi!" exclaimed the treasurer Sindolt. "Why wearest thou the white ensign, if thou be not the messenger!" Then he stepped in front of Paetus and said: "Greeting and handshake first! The German king invites you to ride yourself to his hall and there to present the trade of the Romans! But know that the people resent you and are ill-disposed toward you, so these men are necessary for your protection. I and eleven assistants on oath guarantee you the king's free escort to the castle and then to the border at the bridge."

Sindolt did not wait for a counter-speech either. He waved, and eleven men in armor came out of the ranks and a man carrying a bundle of swords on his back, which he threw to the ground and untied the ropes. Then a second man stepped forward, carrying a torch, with which he lit a quickly laid funeral pyre. At the questioning look of the Tribune Paetus the man answered: " ‘tis holy fire from Wuotan's sanctuary!" Soon the fire was blazing. Each of the twelve had picked up one of the swords, and so they had stepped in a circle around the fire. Each thrust his sword into the earth, and holding it by the hilt, they chanted together the staves of the Ring Oath:

"We took the Rune Oath,
The strongest most enduring,
For King Gambin:
To protect with our shields
The honored guest
In the hall of the sovereign,
In the palace of Stilifrida,
In the land of the Quads
For the duration of the mission!
Not a hair on their heads
Can you bend on the guests;
Free may you strangers be
And unleashed from the ramparts,

How boldly you come,
Not restraining your hatred,
Do not hinder your wandering,
Grant your every wish
To you royal guests.
We swear you protection
With sword's oath
And honest ring oath,
You guests of Gambin,
Guests of Gambin, the Koting and the King!

Thereupon Sindolt stepped back with his eleven assistants in oath; but they left the swords in the ring around the fire. The two men who carried the torch and the swords stayed behind as guards so that the flame would not go out.

Only now did they let the Roman have his say. Paetus extended his hand to Sindolt and said: "I, Vologes Paetus, Legion Tribune and envoy of Caesar Valentinianus semper Augustus, greet the king's messenger! We are ready to follow you."

Equitius breathed a sigh of relief. "So yet this nest will open to me, and let me see the place where the castle shall be brought down"; so he thought, and jumped cheerfully into the saddle.

The train had formed. In front, on horseback, were the two tuba-blowers, then Equitius, carrying the flag and holding the Barbary stallion like a hand-horse, followed by the two litterarii, and behind them alone Vologes Pätus, who was joined at last by the six mounted soldiers.

Then Sindolt stepped forward and asked for a short delay. According to the king's word, he had to introduce his guests to the palace with divine honor, just like the Car-Naval of the goddess Ostara at the time of early spring.

Equitius and Paetus did not quite understand what kind of honor the treasurer meant.

Then a hundred men came forward; they were as gods. They carried a strange garment on long shafts, which, stretched out like a sail, soon enclosed the cavalcade of Romans, so that they were enclosed by a walking tent and could neither be seen, nor could they see. When this tent was folded over the astonished, the twelve sworn men joined the Romans and each took one of the horses by the reins, which they now led with drawn swords. Silently the procession began to move. A hundred heavily armed men walked in front, a hundred behind the walking tent; the rest of the band led by Sindolt, however, had united with the Marshal's men.

Equitius was seething with anger and shame, but there was no objection

nor resistance; he had to submit to the captivity so cleverly disguised as honor, only to save at least appearances. He was even prevented from speaking with his comrades, for soon the horsemen had to follow the road one after the other, as the way became narrow and arduous; also the sworn men prevented confidential dialogues.

Uphill and downhill the road led in serpentine curves, eerie silence surrounded and filled the twilight of the Vandal tent, the only sounds the footsteps of the armed men mingled with the stamping of the horses and the rattle of weapons. The hoofs of the horses thundered on the beams of a bridge and the marching steps threw down a strong sound as if in a hall. From this the Romans realized that they had ridden through a gate. The road went uphill again, the droning died away to give way to the stupefying hooting of numerous people. This came from above on both sides. Equitius concluded that they were traveling along a hollow way, for with each step forward the howling seemed to descend from above, and at last it resounded from the same height as the riders. Here again they had to ride through a gate hall, as the ear thought to hear, but the howling was not interrupted. So a second, inner fortification must have been passed through here. Level ground had been gained. Now the walking tent was continually curving so tightly that it was impossible for the Romans to see the length of their own cavalcade; it was going through the narrow streets of the city, Equitius surmised. But the ride would not end for a long time, and the voices of the roaring people continued uninterrupted, like the roar of a mountain stream. What the masses shouted, the hearing could not disentangle, but the feeling dawned on the Roman that the Quade hardly offered him a friendly welcome. A clang and rattle went through the din, as of armor and weapons, which was quite alarming to the divine honor. Other sounds than the throats of men were heard by the Romans; it was an endless roar, blocking and grunting, a cackling and clucking, as only uncounted herds are able to produce. The stamping of horses and the neighing of steeds rang out as if many hundreds of horses were in the city. That Stilifrida must be more than the miserable nest that Equitius thought he would find, this suspicion now almost timidly crept into his heart. But the tiresome ride had not yet reached its end.

Equitius had become thoughtful. Almost four hundred years had passed and still the Roman had not been able to gain a firm foothold on the left bank of the Danubius; Marcus Aurelius had burned this barbarian nest and yet it rose again from the ashes; inexhaustible were the armies of nations that it sent south; now he understood that the fear of Stilifrida was not unfounded and his confidence in the success of the plan to build roads and castles here began to waver.

He decided to proceed with extreme caution to the execution of the

imperial order. Only prudent moderation, deliberate action, but not the rapid development of power could realize Valentinian's plans in the face of such a youthful people.

Finally the train stopped. Now Equitius hoped to keep a lookout; he had remembered the red tower and thought he could determine the location of the place where they were now.

In front, the linen cloth was lifted, and the sworn men led the Romans' steeds out of the tent. Equitius did a circular glance.

A moderately large courtyard, surrounded by multiform wooden buildings, manned by exquisite warriors, opened to the inquiring gaze. Only one wooden tower stood out, but it was not the red tower, so Equitius did not know the location of the place, for which he was given little opportunity to look.

The Romans on horseback were helped out of their saddles; then they formed up for the procession, surrounded by the twelve sworn men with drawn swords. Now Paetus sounded the fanfares, and Sindolt called with a loud voice to the gulf of the hall that the Roman messengers were waiting to be admitted.

Then the king's bugle boomed from the high seat, and his voice, without rising from his seat, called out to those waiting outside: "Be welcome to the German king, messengers of my neighbor! Offer them welcome and plenty of food; after a long ride they need rest, then they may announce their trade!"

Sindolt now led them into the hall. Twelve chairs had been set up there, opposite the high seat; on these he ordered the Romans to sit down. The king had greeted each of the Romans after Sindolt had told him their names and titles, but he had shaken hands with Paetus and Equitius.

The meal was served and proceeded in silence. "The meal is over, the toil of the journey forgotten; bring then your message, heralds of the Roman Caesar!" thus spoke the king, and having presented to each of the Romans a mighty horn full of noble golden Roman wine, he added: "With this wine, the best of my kingdom, the speech shall be easy for you; your emperor Probus had once sent the vines from Italia to my ancestor. Let us hear if your Caesar Valentinian sends us such a message of blessing as his predecessor Probus! Speak boldly, whatever it may be, I have promised you free conduct; therefore speak!"

Then Paetus rose, bowed low before the king, put his hand on his heart and began his speech.

He spoke much with high-sounding words of the magnanimity of his emperor, of his love of peace and friendship with his neighbor, King Gambinius; how the magnanimous Caesar wanted to improve the roads in Quadia at his own expense, so that the mule could be burdened with greater loads, and perhaps even that wagons could be used. And this road would

benefit the Quades, who would be allowed to use it duty-free, without having to provide for its construction. Stilifrida would become as rich, as brilliant, as Carnuntum itself, even becoming its sister city. The kind Caesar would decorate it with a palace, build warehouses along the streets, in which weary travelers - whether Romans or Quads - would find hospitable lodging. No more rattling legions should pass through the beautiful neighboring country of Rome, only a small crew, as today, for protection against robbery. As a token of his Caesar's friendship towards the mighty Quades ruler, he had letter and gift to present and asked for friendly acceptance of the message.

In this speech, the eloquent Roman had managed to conceal the emperor's intention, and it was certainly not his fault if it did not achieve its purpose.

An eerie silence remained in the king's chamber, but the hateful eyes of the king's retinue had given him an eloquent answer, so eloquent that a warm blush ran down his temples and he almost lost his composure.

Then Gambin rose from the high seat. With difficulty, Paetus hid a slight tremor as he offered Caesar's scroll to the mighty man.

"Well said, Roman!" replied the king. Letter and gift from the Roman Caesar be not spurned. But it is not the custom in German lands to keep testimony without purpose. Horn and steed are worthy to me, because both can be used; these I keep. But a chain burdens only slaves, even if it is of gold; as long as I am king, it never touches my neck. Your custom is different, so let it be yours, and tell your Caesar that I have given it to you as a reward for your excellent speech!"

With this word the king had put the chain around the neck of the completely bewildered Paetus, who blushing felt it, how scornful looks met him, which sparkled from the table companions over the edges of their drinking horns to him. But still it remained silent in the hall.

The king continued: "What use is the Roman crown to me? How dangerous could it be to you and to us if I were mistaken for a Roman army commander in the thick of battle? Take it, Equitius, who is so powerful in Caesar's favor that it should please me to give it to you, the future Roman army commander, in anticipation. Thus the gifts would be distributed according to right and advantage." Equitius also felt aggrieved, though not to the same extent as Paetus; he too accepted the gift with a bow.

After a thoughtful drink, the king, turning to Paetus, said: "Well, my boy, do you yourself believe in the word of peace and friendship, of magnanimity and goodwill toward the neighboring king at a time when you let it go unpunished that my daughter was stolen - stolen, do you hear, boy, stolen from me, this very neighboring king's daughter! Do you think, Milkbeard, that you spoke a word of truth about peace and friendship at the same time when they dared to tell my legation that Carnuntum was too big to look for a girl there,

and that she would fare better in the finer world than in the land of bears; I should console myself! You call that peace and loyalty to the neighboring king! And shall I tell you, Magister Armorum, how your streets, palaces and warehouses, which your magnanimous Caesar wants to build for me, shall be according to your thoughts? Then ask the Alemannic king Makrian, he will tell you how those on the Rhine look like, and you have the answer! So go home and tell your Caesar that we are grateful for the road and the warehouse, and if he wanted to build them against our will, we would be strong enough to chase him across the Danube and throw the baked stones at him. And if the Gods had not saved my child, I would have taken her myself. But you have brought me the friendship of your Caesar; so let us part as friends, royal escort is provided. Each of you, who is not mounted, will receive a horse saddled and bridled, so that you will be able to bring my greetings to your master without delay. Farewell!"

Gambin sat down, lifted his horn, emptied it and placed it booming on the table, on which he rubbed it noisily. Laughing, the kings did the same.

A deafening din had arisen, cursing Equitius stomped the ground, but no one paid attention to him, reddened with shame, destroyed, Paetus stood next to the Magister Armorum.

The latter tried to get a word in edgewise, but the kings, laughing increasingly, placed their empty drinking horns on the table tops with such forceful roar that his words of anger died away unheard in the king's chamber.

Sindolt approached the Roman unawares and pushed him out of the hall; the same happened to the others. Quickly they were lifted onto the horses, whereby one did not fail to tie Equitius' armor to the back of his steed, and before they knew what was happening to them, the tent of exchange was already stretched out over the twelve. Again the ride began through the jeers of the excited people.

In the meantime, the Roman camp had become lively. Randmar had erected a house with numerous workmen before it was thought that he had quite begun; in it the Romans lay carousing and feasting on abundantly spread animal skins and were not a little pleased with such excellent lodging. Even if the marshal was bearishly rude, he left the royal guests wanting for nothing; each individual's slightest wish was fulfilled as if he were Caesar Valentinian himself.

Thus the meal passed happily and cheerfully, and some had made themselves comfortable to take a nap. Then the Romans were startled, for the sound of horses trotting was heard, as if a mighty band of horsemen were approaching. But they were in the wide hall and deprived of the view. Soon they had calmed down again and lay down to sleep.

Now the envoys had reached their camp. Their astonishment was not small when they saw the quickly built house, which Sindolt pointed out to

them with a smiling face, saying: "Look, we also know how to build warehouses, perhaps faster than you, stone bakers!"

Displeased, Equitius turned away. Then he saw the horses. He knew enough, because behind them a swarm of at least five hundred lance bearers, already ready for the journey, held in their saddles.

And still the flame blazed in the sword ring.

Now Sindolt carried one of the numerous cauldrons, in which the meal had been prepared for the Romans, and extinguished the fire, whereupon each sworn man pulled his sword out of the ground and threw it aside. One man tied the blades together again and lifted them on his back.

Although all this took place in silence, Equitius and Paetus did not need an explanatory word. They gathered their soldiers and ordered them to mount the horses, so as not to add to the scorn by hesitation.

Sindolt with his team did not leave the twelve Romans, they surrounded them like a guard of honor, while the mounted Romans were surrounded by the great swarm of horsemen.

Nimbly this had taken place without a word. At a sharp trot they went south along the Amber Road, without stopping or resting, until they reached the bridgehead, behind whose battlements the mirror of the Danube shone.

Above it, however, the mighty silhouette of Carnuntum stood out proudly from the darkening evening sky.

The cavalcade stopped on foaming steeds.

With a loud hoiho, the five hundred retreated and circled the mounted Romans in a wide ring. Sindolt, however, took leave of his protectors and testified to them his joy that he had succeeded so admirably in preserving the staffed oath of the ring without the stroke of a sword. He then spoke many a binding word in view of the Roman guard at the bridgehead, which Paetus also returned in well-placed speech. After sufficient talk of friendship and good neighborliness on both sides, the Quades surrounded the Romans with loud hoots and hollers in a triple circle, and then chased away inland as fast as an arrow.

The gate at the bridgehead opened to the Romans for the silent entry into Carnuntum.

Chapter Ten

Schwanhild

Caesar Valentinian had assembled the high council in the marble hall of the Hibernum Castrum at Carnuntum.

Praetorians manned the doors and corridors, and three lictors each stood on either side of the throne on which sat grave and somber Valentinian. He listened to the speech of the Proconsul.

The latter was anxious to present the failed legation to King Gambinius in the worst possible light, in order to cast suspicion on the hated Equitius to the best of his ability.

The Proconsul could never get over the fact that Equitius had become Magister Armorum in the same hour that Valentinian had sent the young Marcellianus to school, so his speech was full of poisonous bile.

The Proconsul had spoken for a long time, and now thought to recognize from the gloomy brooding of the emperor that his words had ignited, therefore he spoke the conclusion:

"Consider then, O Caesar, all that has been said! consider how cowardly Equitius kept himself, how un-Roman! If he had been the man you thought him to be, with the sword in his fist and a death wound on his forehead, he would have fallen as a Roman, instead of pathetically yielding to the superior force and saving his dear life. With fear and trembling the barbarians would then have approached you to ask for peace and forgiveness, for they would have had to say to themselves: If Rome sends us an army of such death-defying heroes, then Germania must tremble! Barefoot, the insolent chief Gambinius would have come to kiss your foot, instead of letting you know that he would throw their clay cakes at the stone bakers, when he himself chased them across the Danubius! Therefore my advice, O Caesar, is this: you let Equitius die the traitor's death, lead your legions to Stilifrida yourself, and build on its ruins the colony of Valentiniana! Dixi!"

A look of deepest contempt flashed from Valentinian's eyes at

Maximianus. Then the emperor, visibly trying to keep calm, said:

"Proconsul! I have heard your advice and thank you for the zeal with which you are concerned for Rome's welfare and his Caesar's honor. But thou overshot the mark; Equitius was brave and never a coward. The soldier, to whom the sword in the scabbard sounds angrily, and who has the prudence to tell his sword: "Patience, also your time will come", such a soldier possesses more than courage, he calls the bravery of wise moderation his inestimable own! And such is the bravery of the commander, which I appreciate in Equitius. He is able to defeat himself and therefore also the enemy when the time comes. Tell me, would he have acted wisely if he had done as you wished? Where are my legions? The double fourteenth at Carnunt - you know that very well - is not complete, and the other rolled up on the many miles of shore between Vindomina and Arabona without sufficient reserve in the rear. Also, the Gentes Marcomanorum have lately become alarmingly unreliable and defiant due to the mysterious hauntings. As much as I appreciate the zeal that you, your son and others have applied to their investigation, these phenomena have remained more inexplicable to you than to those who wish to see their god of war in the ghost. Consider this, Proconsul, and you will also admire the moderation of the Magister Armorum in the knowledge that we are not quick-witted today. I praise him for this, that he was sensible enough to allow me to consider the divine reverence shown to my legation as a true homage, although we know that we are mistaken! And yet, has he not brilliantly fulfilled the mission? Have we not learned what we wanted to learn? Do we not now know that Gambinius is the German federal king, do we not know the state of Stilifrida, that numerous well-armed and well-trained troops are amassed there, and that they have considerable cavalry at their disposal? And it is not this knowledge alone that Equitius brought us; therefore I find him worthy of reward, as of the continuance of my trust. Call for me the Magister Armorum!"

The emperor had finished. Pale, trembling with rage, the Proconsul sat on his visellium; once again the ropemaker's son in the Caesar's cloak had thwarted the patrician's plans with scorn, even managed, by deceptive facial expressions, to betray unwisely his true disposition. Shame and anger wrestled for dominance in his black heart. But in this hour he vowed bitter revenge to the Magister Armorum: then, when the emperor would have Carnuntum at his back, then, when he would think himself all-powerful again, then he intended to settle accounts with Equitius. He had clenched his fist under his toga and bit his lips bloody.

The emperor had seen through the Proconsul, but prudence forced him, too, to conceal this realization. The imperial officials were afflicted with the most miserable Byzantinism, and he, the individual, was powerless against it.

Only gradually could he fight this cancerous damage to the state, for where would he have found suitable men for a sudden reorganization of conditions? That is why he watched with anxious care over those whom he saw fit to serve as pillars of his rebuilding of the state, knowing well that otherwise they would be lost without salvation. He was therefore content to keep up appearances as if he believed the deceptive words of the Proconsul.

Equitius had entered. He had bent one knee before Caesar and kissed the hem of the Emperor's cloak, but then did not stand up as usual and look joyfully into the emperor's eye, but remained kneeling before the emperor with his head bowed, silent and in humility. He felt the shame of a defeated commander.

Deep silence fell over the assembly. Then Equitius at last lifted his tear-stained eye to that of his warlord; a ray of hope lighted up his soul, for upon him rested a look of benevolence. The old confidence had come over him, and relieved he rose.

"I have sent for thee, Magister Armorumn," said the emperor graciously, "that thou mayest report to me and to the high council how thou hast searched the Quadian country, so far as it has been possible under the unfavorable circumstances. Speak!"

"Sublime, incomprehensibly kind Caesar!" Equitius almost exulted with shining eye. "Thou dost not anger me, however unfortunate I have been!"

But with earnest mildness the emperor replied:

"The message was dazzle. Nor had I demanded any feat of arms, or you would have been placed at the head of legions! You should explore the opportunity of the country, and report of it!"

Now Equitius told how he initially marched with his small band along the banks of the Danubius eastward to where the rigid cliff of the Maidenberg rises above the mouth of the Marahabia. There was the point for a mighty castle to dominate that river mouth and the land beyond. Thereupon he moved westward along the shore towards the river, as if he did not know the road. Then a point was found that united three roads; one coming from Stilifrida, the other from Vindomina, and the third from Carnunt. This was the place for the second castle, said Equitius, because from there one looked to the north, while the left foot was in Vindomina and the right in Carnuntum. The emperor nodded with approval, the other councilors also gave fullest recognition to the explanations of the young Magister Armorum; even Maximian had voted with a tilt of the head.

Now Equitius reported on his onward journey, which had soon ceased to be voluntary, and what he had experienced at Stilifrida. To this the all-considering soldier attached the urgent admonition to Valentinian to see to it that Carnuntum's garrison was ready for war with the greatest acceleration, to

keep everything in readiness for battle along the riverbank, to arrange sufficient reserves in double ranks, and finally to send the Gentes Marcomanorum to the most remote garrisons imaginable, possibly against the Parthians, because along the Danubius one was nowhere sure of their loyalty, indeed the same danger threatened from them as from an enemy army in the rear.

Equitius had talked himself into a frenzy, and in doing so he had lost all awareness of his surroundings; but the assembled council had also been carried away by his convincingly clear words, only the emperor sat seriously, following the speech, in front of the bold speaker.

But he continued: "Therefore, my Caesar, leave castles and roads unbuilt now, until you have gathered well-trained and numerous legions at the Danubius; do not provoke the anger of the Quads at an inopportune time, yes, scare away their already awake distrust. Make them safe, and when thou art armed, strike the blow simultaneously along the whole shore line of the Danubius! It is not fear, Caesar, that makes me speak thus. As your envoy I could not do otherwise; in disguise alone I will search the left bank, for then I may strike where the envoy had to carefully conceal the fist of wrath in the fold of Sagum, so as not to endanger the interest of the state."

The emperor rose and laid his right hand on the shoulder of Equitius and said: "Well spoken, Magister Armorum! Gambinius had struck thee right; keep the field armor and be legate from now on! In the future, you will be subject to me personally and bring your reports to me alone. You will cross the border as often as you wish, and you will not need any further orders or consent; nor will anyone ask you how and why, or how long you will be away!

Equitius was stunned, but so was the Proconsul, who knew well why Valentinian had removed the Magister Armorum from his domain. But even now the Emperor pretended not to suspect what was going on in the Proconsul's mind, and only allowed himself a mocking glance, which he sent to Maximianus.

With the usual pomp, the high council was soon closed by the emperor.

Equitius had nothing more urgent to do, dressed in the splendid imperial armor, than to hasten to Agrippina, to find in the embraces of the princess a substitute for the terror which the present day had produced in his soul, but which, thanks to Mars and Venus, had so unexpectedly happily turned into joy.

Several days had passed since then.

The sun was already low in the west over the crest of Mons Cetius, when Marcus Equitius, in the disguise of an Oriental merchant, hurried along the left bank of the Marahabia, because he intended to cross Trajan's bridge before the night overtook him in the land of the Quades. But this was more difficult than

he had thought. Although there was hardly an hour's journey between the lonely walker and the bridgehead at Stopfenreuth, another obstacle separated him from it, and that was the riverbed of the Marahabia. Of course, Equitius was an excellent swimmer, but he was also an even better soldier and as such detested water not only in his stomach, but even more in his boots. Therefore, he had considered swimming across more than once without coming to a decision and was still walking along the left bank of the river.

The shadows had grown longer and longer and had finally wrapped everything in their veils, and only a train of wild ducks high up in the blueness of the sky was still surrounded by the reddish gold of the sun.

As mischievously happy as a playful child, Marahabia skipped next to Equitius through the splendor of the floodplain forest, as if she wanted to rejoice in the problems she was causing him. She held her mirror out to the meadows, but when they wanted to look at themselves in it, shoo, a soft breeze came over it, and the mirror became cloudy, as if a beauty had come too close to the polished metal with her kissing mouth, while she thought to admire herself smugly. Then again she played jokingly with the old elm giants, which lowered their branches into the water, but did not let them go when the lively river wanted to snatch them away.

Equitius had seen all this unhappily, for nowhere did he see a jetty or an abandoned fishing boat, as he had hoped to find.

Then the mirror of the Marahabia unexpectedly widened like a lake in front of him, hindering his further march, for the shore suddenly swung to the left to where the rocky face of the Maidenberg plunged vertically into the tide, denying even a mountain goat the barest path.

Over there, however, the broad expanse of the Danubius flickered through the dark foliage.

Discontented by the annoying obstacle, he stopped, considering once again whether it was really inevitable that he would have to make use of his swimming skills, sighing deeply as he took a closer look at the charming landscape.

Lush brown-green framed the lonely bay and above the almost impenetrable floodplain forest, the Maidenberg's rocky cliffs rose jagged up into the dark blue. In between, however, the lake laughed and reflected the friendly picture to offer it to the viewer once again. Then the reflection melted again, when the evening wind swept over it, into a wondrous play of colors, and the somber anemone color danced next to the serene blue of the sky or the eerie brown of the moss in the magical chiaroscuro of the dawning evening.

Once again Equitius kept a lookout, but in vain; here, too, no barge was to be found. He must swim. Annoyed, he descended the break in the bank and wound his way through the reeds, where he reached a narrow grassy bank from

which he intended to plunge into the river.

White linen shone before him in the grass; but he was not yet clear about the interpretation of the strange find, when two lily-white arms emerged from the water at his feet, soon followed by a lovely girl's head.

Equitius was not long under the spell of surprise; he was a soldier, young and stupid. Therefore, he quickly picked up the robe of the bathing girl, before she was able to prevent him, and noticed that next to the robe lay rich gold jewelry in the grass. This he left untouched.

The robe itself was of the finest white wool; there was also a veil-like linen, as delicate as Greek cloth.

At first the girl was shocked, but when she realized that the stranger had left the jewels untouched and therefore could not be a robber, she became calmer. Surrounded by whispering reeds, she lifted her beautiful body up to her hips out of the rippling tide and looked with sea-bottom-deep forget-me-not eyes at Equitius so fervently that he was overcome by a strange feeling such as his heart had never felt before, not even in Agrippina's luxuriant bedchamber.

The two stood silently gazing at each other for a long time; then he lowered his eye, for he could not bear the reproachful, pleading look of the girl. At the same time a higher red poured over his cheeks, sorrow and joy, pain and pleasure stormed in his bosom, he wanted to flee and yet stay again, he felt transformed and did not know how.

Then the girl broke the silence and said in a softly cajoling voice: "The laws of the Nixie compels us to follow he who steals our swan's top; but we are released from the spell when the shirt is ours again. Then we return home to the blue water's bottom, caught, and the robber's soul follows us into the water's dungeon, never to return. Soullessly the searching man wanders fearfully through all worlds; he cannot live, he cannot die, he cannot laugh, he cannot cry! Longing for the swan-maiden, longing for his raptured soul, his heart is tortured, he suffers death agony in every moment with triple agony, because he is never able to die. The water does not devour him, the fire does not consume him, the rope does not strangle him, the sword does not destroy him! Eternally, thrice eternally he wanders through the nations, shunned as a ghost and yet a man; despised, cursed, despising himself, cursing, fleeing on and on to the highest pinnacles of the mountains, throwing himself from them to the deepest depths of yawning abyss - in vain! He lives, for he must live to thrice undying torment!

Equitius had staggered back; a shrill cry of anguish had escaped, echoing, from his breast; yet he pressed the mermaid's swan-shirt only the more tightly to his breast, forgetting the flight. The never before seen incomparable beauty of the mermaid had done it to him. With drunken eyes he clung covetously to the charming figure and with flying breath he gasped: "Tell me, how can the mortal win you, foamborn, in love? A thousand eternities of torment are too

little for one hour of the most blissful happiness!"

The mermaid stood motionless and even the reeds remained rustless. The veils of the night sank dimly and the stars shone up from the mermaid lake as if they were the captured souls of the swan shirt robbers. Then the reeds rustled and whispered the words to the ear of the shaken one: "Nixie law knows no means for this, as you walk the earth! Give the shirt, return home to your kind!"

"Never, in spite of all the terrors of Tartarus I will not!" cried Equitius, as if in madness; then he added in a pleading tone, "And yet what thou wilt resist is possible, ancient myths know it; behold beseeching him who has power to command!"

Again there was a rustling in the reeds and the mermaid's answer sounded warmer: "Truth is what the myths proclaim, but the statutes demand free decision from the earth-born as well as from the water-born to sweet embrace; therefore give me the shirt! Shun compulsion, and thou needest not fearfully guard robbery!"

"Thou wouldst follow me?" cried Equitius, delighted.

The mermaid seemed to have overheard this word, for she continued, "Eternal is the life of the wave maidens, but imperceptibly short that of men, and shorter still their love. Human love is less to the immortals than an hour to you dust-born, and yet the mermaid eternally atones for such a short dream of delight!"

"And yet thou wouldst follow me unceremoniously?" cried Equitius' feverishly, and his arm lowered, with which he held the swan's shirt.

"The swan's plumage thou gavest not yet, and I no promise," was the mermaid's answer. Quietly she stirred, and dreamlike her lily-white body shone from the gray-green reeds through the veils of twilight.

"How may I give it thee!" wailed Equitius. "Thou dost melt into the waters, and I fail to become a flower like Narcissus'!"

"I am in thy power," sighed the mermaid. "Use it greatly!"

"Take the robe! Marcus Equitius was never great!" he cried in painful agitation, and softening, he added, "Only once to sense the supreme bliss for which Zeus became a shower of gold, a swan, then I would feel Prometheus' torments like sweetest delights! Take your robe and be magnanimous, as befits the immortals!"

With that, he dropped the robe and hurried through the reeds, as if he were fleeing, and then threw himself into the grass, sobbing loudly. Another sound was audible, the whispering of the reeds, the splashing of the waves had ceased.

Gradually the despairing man regained his senses. Now he cursed himself for his magnanimity in letting the mermaid go; if only he had burned the

swan's shirt, she would never have escaped him! He felt it, the soul had kidnapped her from him, and the agony of death had to be the bliss of the blessed against the pain of longing! Yes, what did he care now for Rome, Carnunt, the Castelle, the Magister Armorum, the Legate, what all his dreams, all his hopes for the future! All had fled with his soul, kidnapped by the cruel mermaid.

How furiously he jumped up and rushed back to the pond to seek his death in it. He was already standing on the shore, ready to jump. There he felt himself embraced by two soft arms and a glowing kiss burned on his lips. Everything had changed to the most blissful delight.

The bliss lasted only a short time. Like a snake, the delicate, supple figure wriggled out of his embrace, and he was stunned to hear the words: "Journey home, my Equitius, Legate and Magister Armorum; journey home, you hooded one! At new moon we mermaids are denied love; return when the moon's first ring shines among the stars. I am thine, thou mine, be secretive, and come alone to thy Swanhild! Farewell!"

How frozen stood Equitius; his disguise seen through, his name, his mission unraveled! That he himself unveiled his secret, that did not occur to him; for one notices imprudence only in others, seldom in oneself. Therefore he cried out in amazement: "How, you know me, Swanhild, and yet you say goodbye?"

"Much is known to us, and though not all, yet more than to you men," replied the mermaid in a gentle tone. "Come, be discreet, and fear nothing but myself! Equitius, farewell!"

Once more their lips met in a hot kiss, then Swanhild suddenly disappeared. Deep silence lay over pond and meadow, impenetrable night veiled the landscape; where had the lovely one so suddenly drifted away to? Equitius strained all his fibers to catch a sound, a rustle in the foliage, a whisper of the reeds, a splash in the pond, but it remained silent and nothing betrayed the direction in which the mermaid had slipped away.

Blissful dreaming enveloped the so quickly transformed one; he stretched himself down to the earth and kissed the place where Swanhild had been standing. He thought no more of the onward march.

The night sank deeper and deeper: there, too, the soul of the lonely man had been lulled into the deepest sleep by the whispering dreams.

But the black-haired Roman had also become dear to Hulda's blond priestess. She had been paralyzed by a sudden shock at the first sight of him, but the constant habituation of showing herself to people as a supernatural being had helped her to deceive him as well. With a mysterious nature she had blinded him, defeated him with cunning; she had become free of him without fleeing, without having forgiven him anything of her divinity, but she herself

had been seized by the fire, which she was now no longer able to dampen. Even if the priestesses were not denied the pleasures of love, (1) Swanhild had other things in mind; the thought of escape had run through her soul, and therefore she wanted to delay Equitius with deceptive words in order to find time for reflection.

Gliding silently over the grassy carpet, favored by the night darkness, Swanhild had slipped away from Equitius. On small ledges of the rock wall with path-safe foot she had scurried over the mirror of the pond, until she disappeared in a narrow crevice, which led into the interior of the rock. This, too, was filled with water, which only gave way to the rising ground after several steps into the interior. Narrow crevices, winding incalculable fissures, sometimes narrow and tight, sometimes hall-like widening with adventurous formations of stalactites, led in many branches through the interior of the Maidenberg, also sending an exit upward, which opened out on the rock's summit. There, as in Stronegg, a castle of the gods with rampart and moat and a mighty round tower rose, surrounded by thorny bushes, the age-old symbol of the divine fire-wall of protection.

Also in this Maidenberg dwelled Nomen and Gottesfrohnden, only their number was increased by the Riten, the priestesses of Hulda, the water goddess, to whom the pond was sacred, which the Marahabia formed before she poured her floods into the Danube.

At last Swanhild had reached her chamber. It was a chasm-like cave room, narrow and long, sloping upward and giving insight into many an inaccessible cave mouth. Fantastic stone formations adorned the chamber and gave it an eerie appearance. A niche lined with forest moss, linen spread over it, was the mermaid's lair. Swanhild threw herself onto it, but not as happily as Equitius, she had fled from sleep.

Restless, her head resting in her hand, she lay there, thinking of the adventure she had passed. She was not able to banish the confused images that fluttered around her, the chasing worries and doubts, delights and anxieties, and so she left herself to the unsteady play of the waking dream. Vague veils covered the future, only the present shone in a brighter light, for love's ray of warmth had touched her heart. Always and again the powerful masculine figure of the Roman appeared before her, and the threatening shadows of Albruna, the wise women and the God-fearing sank ever more insubstantially

1) Even if love was generally increased for the priestesses, it was nevertheless tolerated for them under special coincidences, which could be referred to divine destiny, and the offspring resulting from such unions enjoyed special honors as "Kotinge" for themselves and their own descendants resulting from conjugal unions. This was especially true of sons; daughters again became priestesses, or more correctly representatives of the female deities, as here the mermaid Schwanhilde at the Maidenberge.

into the dark distance of uncertain times.

Her thoughts had not yet twisted themselves into the guiding thread, in order to give the self-determining weave at the loom of her destiny, and yet she had already decided unconsciously: the love for Equitius had remained the victor.

And again the sun had risen, and the sleeper at the mermaid pond had awakened.

Now he was again completely Magister Armorum. The adventure he had passed could not keep him here any longer, for he knew only too well that all inquiries after his beautiful mermaid would be a futile endeavor; therefore he prepared himself for departure.

Soon he had prepared a kind of raft from dry branches, which he entwined with willows, which now held his clothes while he swam along beside it, and so he happily reached the far bank of the Marahabia.

Equitius, who was accustomed to the Roman steam baths, did not particularly like the forced cold bath at first, but he soon became so reconciled to it that he only climbed ashore when his stomach asserted its rights. Here he stretched out in the high grass, leaving it to the warming rays of the morning sun to dry his body, while he was busily engaged in consuming the not particularly plentiful supplies of his bread bag and emptying the wine residue of the gourd.

He was not a little amused by the comparison of his dignity as an imperial legate with his present situation and the frugal contents of his bread bag; after all, the breakfast of the high military dignitary was a far more modest one than that of an ordinary legionary on the march. If it did not seem reprehensible to him to do scouting work, and if he even regarded it as an honorable task because it was dangerous and important, it was contrary to his sense of honor to receive hospitality from those whose country he was exploring in a hostile spirit; therefore he carried supplies of food with him on his sneaky paths and was thus forced to make extreme restrictions. Now, however, in view of the battlements of Carnuntum, there was no need to save any more, and so he dined with cheerfulness in his heart and did not stop his epicurean meal until the last crumb of bread had been eaten and the frequently baptized wine gave the same sensation as fresh, unmixed Danube water.

Then he realized that this was an inconvenient place to linger, and he set out to reach Carnuntum.

After barely two hours of walking through lush floodplain wilderness, he had reached the bridgehead, and soon after, he was again adorned with the outer insignia of the Legate by his nomenclator Sixtus.